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A Consideration of William Butler Yeats as a Dramatist Focusing on the *Plays for Dancers*

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by

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my three beautiful daughters, Julia, Jasmine and Jessica. I deeply appreciate all your patience, support and love as I spent time away from home, got moody and otherwise was a trial to live with during the completion of this thesis.

You gave me my inspiration to complete this dissertation.

Love,
Fran/Mommy

Abstract

The goal of this thesis is to consider the issue of Yeats as a dramatist, focusing specifically on the four plays that he published as the *Plays for Dancers.* These plays were influenced heavily by Japanese *noh* plays. The adaptation of *noh* and Yeats' knowledge of *noh* are very complex subjects. These will be discussed in the introduction and the general form of the thesis laid out. Yeats is also known for his involvement in founding the Abbey Theatre. He is considered one of the founders of Irish professional theatre. In chapter one I will consider this aspect of Yeats' reputation. Yeats did not simply write Japanese *noh*–style plays about Irish stories. Instead, his plays were the result of an involved process of adaptation. In chapter two, I perform an examination of this process. In order to illustrate the above process, I will show how the *noh* play, *Aoi No Ue,* was adapted by Yeats to create his play *The Only Jealousy of Emer* in chapter three. Further I will consider how Yeats adapted the plot of his play from Irish tales and compare it with the adaptation of the original story from *The Tale of Genji.* In chapter four, I will look at the first of the *Plays for Dancers, At the Hawk's Well,* and how Yeats adapted it. In chapter five I examine critical reactions to the *Plays for Dancers.* This chapter is divided into two sections as I examine reactions to productions of *At the Hawk's Well* done during Yeats' lifetime and then posthumous productions. In chapter six, I examine several productions of the *Plays for Dancers,* while considering the question "is it Yeats?" I tackle the issue

of whether a director should follow Yeats' suggestions for production of these plays or if he can ignore them.

In the conclusion I look at the opinions of a number of theatre professionals and an audience member on two productions at the Yeats Festival in Dublin. I use these and the other materials throughout the thesis to reach a conclusion regarding Yeats' ability as a playwright.

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Introduction

Section I – Overview

W. B. Yeats was a founder of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and a great poet as well as an innovative playwright. His poetics and idea of the theatre were sometimes abstruse and aimed at an elite rather than a popular audience. As someone who has been a dramaturg and who has a practical sense of the theatre, I wish to discuss Yeats as a playwright in four of his key plays, specifically those that have been produced in a manner which highlight the nature of his dramatic art. Although Yeats did not know Japanese and did not have the same sense of *noh* plays that subsequent scholarship and productions have given us, he was able to use what might be called the idea of the *noh* play - his idea - to create distinctive plays that have made a strong contribution to Irish theatre and to English-speaking theatre generally.

Yeats' so-called *noh plays* contribute to Irish culture and English-speaking theatre because of his skill and their very distinctiveness, something that a great artist like Yeats could create. Like William Blake, whom he admired, Yeats paradoxically creates a complex private interpretation of mythology and the national and poetic myths and can do so in language and representations that are seemingly simple. Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* have a strange singularity which is one reason for their success. Yeats appropriated Japanese *noh for* his own purposes in his own context. They inspired Yeats, but he was not true to them in details of language and the intricate conventions used in Japan. He has used them as an inspiration to transform his own dramatic art, and he has done so with great impact. Since Yeats' death some people in the theatre have tried to appeal to their audience in dramaturgical choices which are dissimilar from Yeats' in producing these plays. This is an understandable decision, but occasionally they have succeeded in distancing that audience from these strange, beautiful and wonderful plays.

Yeats has been widely praised for about a century for his poetic excellence. While his reputation as a poet is the role for which he was most known, Yeats spent his entire adult life writing plays. Thus, what I will be tackling is what kind of dramatist he was. Specifically, I have chosen to focus on an intriguing era in Yeats' playwriting career which resulted in his *Plays for Dancers*. The *Plays for Dancers* were written between 1915 and 1921. First Yeats wrote *At the Hawk's Well* (first performed in 1916 in Lady Emerald Cunard's drawing room) among Yeats' Cuchulain plays the first chronologically in the life of the main character. Second came *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (first performed in Amsterdam, 1922 against Yeats' will and without his knowledge), another Cuchulain play in which Yeats wanted to experiment with changing a character's mask/persona in the middle of the action. Third Yeats wrote *The Dreaming of the Bones* (first performed in 1931 at the Abbey Theatre), a very noh-like tale of ghosts who are not forgiven and must continue their sojourn in our world; Finally he penned *Calvary* (first performance unknown) about the biblical tale of Christ. Most of these plays are based on specific noh plays which can be found in the *'Noh' or Accomplishment* by Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound.

With regard to his reputation as a dramatist, it has been asserted that Yeats was the founder of Irish theatre. In chapter one I will consider that idea with the input of Mary Trotter, who wrote a book on the subject of the history of Irish theatre. This book critically examined Yeats' position as the father figure of Irish theatre, without whom there would be no Irish Theatre today, specifically relating to the Abbey Theatre which is considered the centre and genesis of Irish theatre. Trotter's examination of this reputation made me question such long-held assumptions. Like Trotter, Yeats was important to Irish theatre in that he helped found the Abbey and that he was instrumental in causing the Irish theatre public to change some of their behaviours and expectations of theatre.

Since the *Plays for Dancers* are heavily influenced by Japanese traditional *noh* drama, in chapter two I examine how Yeats utilized and incorporated aspects of *noh* into these plays. I find that Yeats was both unable, due to his lack of experience with *noh,* and uninterested in recreating *noh* in the plays under consideration.

In chapter three I do my first of two close readings of a *Play for Dancers,* specifically *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* I compare it in some detail to its precursor, the *noh* play *Aoi No Ue.* Here I demonstrate in some detail the ways in which Yeats informed the ancient Irish tale of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* with his own dramatic concepts while including aspects of *noh* which had fascinated him since before he found them in Japan. I find that this detailed examination of Yeats' dance play shows Yeats' concern for his desired audience and thus reinforces his position as a dramatist whose work is presentable in my eyes. In chapter four I show how Yeats used *noh* in the first of his *Plays for Dancers* which was entitled *At the Hawk's Well.*

This play and its *noh* influence figure prominently in my discussion of theatrical criticism in chapter five. In chapter five I consider the issue of the opinions of professional drama critics. I originate my discussion with some reactions to early productions of *At the Hawk's Well,* all of which took place during Yeats' lifetime. I made this decision because I felt that Yeats would have been able to have input into and react to these productions. Indeed, Yeats attended each early production discussed in this chapter. I then go on to compare these reactions to those of professional theatre critics regarding posthumous productions. I find that more and more questions arise regarding the suitability of Yeats' work for the stage as the reviews become more recent. In chapter six I look at a number of late 20th century productions of the *Plays for Dancers*. I find that the question of how similar these productions are to Yeats' original prescriptions for these plays arises. As a theatre artist with a career in acting and dramaturgy, I argue that it is not necessary to follow the suggestions set forth by a playwright, be s/he living or dead when producing one of his/her plays as theatre is a living form which inherently requires new ideas and change from its practitioners. Thus I find that based upon my personal experience as a theatre artist, the question is not relevant to the issue of whether or not these plays are performable. In the conclusion I look at the experiences of various other theatre artists in working on Yeats' *Plays for Dancers*. They include actors, directors, designers and music composers. Their expertise mingles with mine to closely consider how well these plays work on a stage. The audience is the final arbiter of whether or not a play works on the stage and I leave the final word on this issue to them. Finally I do find that there is no reason that Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* in particular should be impossible or even extremely difficult to perform successfully before a live audience.

The goal of this work is to consider the issue of Yeats as a dramatist. Throughout his professional life, Yeats' reputation as a poet was of the highest calibre. Often in times of financial hardship, Yeats would look for ways to publish poetry in new ways because he knew the publications would improve his finances. He was both extremely popular and very well-respected as a poet. Those who question his ability as a playwright the most always give him his due as a poet. Indeed, for many theatrical reviewers as we will see in chapter five the issue of a poet as playwright is a contentious one. The predominant viewpoint in the reviews that I discovered appears to be that a poet will make for a difficult, overly wordy playwright who creates work that is unpleasant to watch.

I find that while literary critics often consider Yeats' plays as literature, even an offshoot of his poetry, theatre critics, professionals and audience members see them as theatrical pieces intended for the stage. Thus while a literary critic may seem to enjoy enthusing over the beauty of the pieces, people of the theatre are often a bit frightened of them. Specifically I find that the *Plays for Dancers* with their aristocratic and educated intended audience and esoteric origins in Japanese *noh* inspire deep suspicion on the part of reviewers in particular.

I have not seen any examinations of the opinions of theatre professionals on Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* in my research, nor have I found anyone who used such materials as I have to consider the issue of the playability of these pieces. I feel that my position as a dramaturg, literary editor, and actor, having worked professionally on a number of productions, also comes to bear on this examination. The way that I look at a play script and its potential for the stage is similar to that of many of the other theatre professionals whose words I read regarding their experiences with Yeats. Thus, I feel that my experience both as an academic and theatre professional give me an excellent foundation for this study.

Section II – Yeats' Historical and Cultural Base

I begin, as Yeats did, with a discovery of Japanese *noh* theatre and how it came at a turning point in his career as a dramatist. I consider how it affected his *Plays for Dancers.* His first exposure to *noh* came from Ezra Pound who learned of it through his work as literary executor for a deceased American professor named Ernest Fenollosa.

Ernest Fenollosa was an American who taught in Japan for much of his life and was famous for attempting to preserve Japanese traditional art forms. Fenollosa was working on a book in 1908 regarding traditional Japanese *noh* theatre when he died suddenly of a heart attack. Ezra Pound who became Fenollosa's literary executor was left with the job of editing this work into a book, published under the title *'Noh' or Accomplishment – A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan.* Pound in fact himself had very little knowledge of *noh* and thus had a very hard time creating a book from the fragmentary notes Fenollosa had left him. It is important to note that Pound considered his work with the translations "recreations" (39) as Richard Taylor notes in *The Drama of W.B. Yeats – Irish Myth and the Japanese No.*

The fact that Yeats' full knowledge of *noh* drama probably came from a book written by Fenollosa, and edited by Ezra Pound, a man with precious little background in the material and subject matter, is extremely relevant. Yeats was coming at *noh* from a position of relative ignorance. "Yeats, who never actually saw a Noh play properly performed, had no real way of understanding the Noh and its religious profundity. Accuracy, however, was not of the first importance as Yeats was a romantic poet, intent on expressing his own subjective vision." (Sekine, "Preface", ix) Sekine's clear understanding of Yeats' impetus as seen in the above quotation is for me the starting point of understanding Yeats' relationship with *noh* drama and his decisions to alter it significantly to suit his own ends. *Noh* drama follows a fairly solid aesthetic model and Yeats' dance plays do as well. Yeats incorporated the *noh* chorus, the use of music, the basic plot outline (including the initial journey, discovery of the supernatural character and climactic dance), mask, the use of legend or myth for subject matter and the traditional *noh* roles. However, as Sekine asserts, he did not understand fully either the aesthetics of *noh* or the subtle ways that it catered to its intended audience. The result, as we shall see is a specifically Irish and Yeatsian usage of the above *noh* devices with a different theatre aesthetic, theatrical goal and intended audience.

As it is necessary to fully comprehend Yeats' exposure to *noh* in order to understand the uses he puts it to, it is also necessary to understand Yeats himself from an historical and cultural viewpoint. I observed above that Yeats is often considered one of the greatest English poets. While this may be true from a language viewpoint, it is not so from a cultural one. Yeats himself was part of an appropriated colonized culture, that of the Irish. I use the term 'British' to reflect the political and cultural entity of England at this time and the term 'English' to reflect the language. During Yeats' lifetime the seeds were being sown for the 'Irish troubles' which continue to this day. The British Isles have seen a century of terrorism and combat as a result of the political struggle that Yeats found himself embroiled in. Ireland was very much a cultural colony of England during most of Yeats' life (1865-1939). As a result, the excellent education which allowed him to become such a famed writer was both English and British. Both reflections of the traditional Celtic languages and culture were not permitted and indeed punished in schoolchildren in these British-run schools. Yeats was an Englishman from a language standpoint and a British gentleman from a cultural one but he fought hard to maintain and even reclaim as much of his Irish cultural identity as possible. Yeats was a member of what Terry Eagleton termed "the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy" (300). In discussing this group in Ireland throughout Fenollosa and Yeats' lifetimes, Eagleton says:

> It was precisely because they were a *politically* dispossessed group that the Anglo-Irish could shift, as though by way of compensation, to *cultural* production; and their social privileges, in stark contrast to the mass of the Irish, were a precious advantage in this respect. Culture was the territory which the Anglo-Irish were especially equipped to occupy. (300)

Yeats was far from being alone in this cultural/political position. As will be seen, his "elite instincts" (300), as Eagleton describes the Anglo-Irish, taught him to take credit and create histories that put him and his cohorts into important positions, particularly in the establishment of professional Irish drama.

Coming from his position as a member of the Anglo-Irish, Yeats did choose to occupy and even create theatre culture according to his own image of the ideal theatre patron. When he did discover *noh*, he saw it through the lens of Pound, who in turn was seeing *noh* through the lens of Fenollosa. Before Pound's edited version of Fenollosa's work appeared as the book *'Noh' or Accomplishment – A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan,* it appeared in an abbreviated version published by Cuala Press, which was run by Yeats' sisters. This earlier volume, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan: From the Manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, Chosen and Finished by Ezra Pound* featured an

Introduction by Yeats in which he outlined his reaction to *noh* as he understood it. Yeats begins:

> In the series of books I edit for my sister I confine myself to those that have I believe some special value to Ireland, now or in the future. I have asked Mr. Pound for these beautiful plays because I think they will help me to explain a certain possibility of the Irish dramatic movement (I)

Already at the very start of his Introduction to some one else's work, Yeats was introducing his own work and ideas. Yeats explained that, disillusioned by the public reaction to the plays he had written earlier for both his own Abbey Theatre and other theatre companies, he had decided to move his theatre into the drawing room: "indirect and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way – an aristocratic form" (II). Yeats was referring to his first of the *Plays for Dancers* which he entitled *At the Hawk's Well.* In fact in what should have been an Introduction to the Fenollosa/Pound work, Yeats went into some detail regarding his ideas about drama and how his re-working of *noh* could achieve this. Furthermore he went into some specifics regarding *At the Hawk's Well.* Thus he circumvented his sister's request to introduce Pound's re-working of the Fenollosa manuscript and used the venue as an opportunity to further his own theatrical views.

Section III – Yeats Creates a Theatrical Form

Yeats, who hated realism on the stage, attacked the popular theatre of Ireland at the time and its audience:

> Let us press the popular arts on to a more complete realism, for that would be their honesty; and the commercial arts demoralise by their compromise, their incompleteness, their idealism without sincerity or elegance, their pretence that ignorance can understand beauty. In the studio and in the drawing-room we can found a true theatre of beauty (IX).

Yeats was interested in having the "popular arts" stick to what they did best, his hated realism. Since obviously the "mob and press" could not accept his symbolic, romantic vision for the stage as he had previously offered them, he was content to have them enjoy what they wanted while he sought out an audience suitable for his work in the drawing rooms of the rich Anglo-Irish (and just plain Anglo) aristocracy. Here we see Yeats inventing for himself his own audience for his work when he didn't find it elsewhere. This choice of an "aristocratic" audience was also true to the spirit of Yeats' inspiration, *noh* which was largely recreated with a court audience in mind.

As a result of both his dramaturgical intention for these plays and some drawing room politicking with various members of the upper class, Yeats arranged for the production of the first of his Plays *for Dancers* in Lady Emerald Cunard's drawing room in London in 1916. Following this performance there was another production in Lady Islington's drawing room, also in London, which was attended by royalty. Yeats did successfully achieve an aristocratic audience for his plays. However we will see in chapter five how well he chose them.

Eagleton points out that there is nothing more political than someone who claims they are not political. Yeats indeed did have a political agenda with his work in the theatre. He hoped it would help to inspire the Irish people in their nationalist work by giving them a positive image of themselves on the stage. In order to achieve this goal, Yeats incorporated Celtic tales and legends found in the Gaelic-speaking peasant areas of Ireland into his plays. He had learned these tales and legends from his lifelong friend, Lady Augusta Gregory who did some work gathering them in the countryside of Ireland with Yeats. He felt that reintroducing Irish cultural tales to an Irish audience would help his audience improve their image of themselves and provide a feeling of nationalism and pride. Yeats believed that only a truly non-realistic form could provide him with this aesthetic goal and allow the deep changes within his audience for which he was searching to take place. He thought when

Pound informed him of Fenollosa's *noh* manuscripts, that he had found the form for which he had been searching.

Thus, Yeats' exposure to *noh* was through two human filters, in particular Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound. While Fenollosa had some knowledge of the Japanese language and had participated in some basic training in *noh* techniques, he was far from a scholar on the subject. Pound, as previously mentioned, came to the project of creating a working manuscript out of Fenollosa's unfinished translations of *noh* plays from a position of complete ignorance on the subject. His ability to make a coherent book out of what little he had and his lack of understanding of the form is nothing short of miraculous. However, this situation did not improve Yeats' knowledge of *noh.* This fact may not have been an entirely negative one as Yeats was looking for an inspiration rather than a template for his own work and he found it. It may in fact have helped Yeats in his incorporation of *noh* into his own drawing room drama.

In a graduate seminar on Irish theatre, one does not expect to be hearing about Japanese *noh.* Despite this, it is there, as the model for Yeats' *Plays for Dancers*. Somehow something in this old, traditional and codified Japanese form, created halfway around the world and centuries prior, appealed to an Irish dramatist like Yeats. He attempted therein to find an inspiration for the people of Ireland. The reason for this lies, as we shall see, in Yeats' position as a Romantic in search for a universal goal for his intended audience.

To position them within their broader European base, Yeats' *Plays for Dancers,* despite their perceived position as avant-garde or experimental drama, are in fact very central in their importance to European drama as a whole. In my opinion they are some of the first intercultural theatre experiments, paving the way for the intercultural theatre work which continues in Europe. The aesthetic results of these intercultural productions are always interesting.

Chapter One - William Butler Yeats' Importance to Irish Theatre

Some critics have declared that Irish theatre began with the Irish Literary Theatre, established by William Butler Yeats and his colleagues in 1899. This is both true and untrue. This thesis will explore the issue of what kind of theatre existed prior to the Irish Literary Theatre and the Irish National Theatre Society also known as the Abbey. The latter theatre company still exists, producing on its two stages two full theatre seasons a year.

The process of creating the Abbey Theatre for Yeats, I find, was very much about defining what Irish theatre was and should be. In making such an attempt he felt strongly that he had to differentiate Irish theatre from all that he hated most in English theatre. For Yeats Irish theatre had to focus on Irish themes. Yeats seemed to believe that the ideal of Irish theatre was to create actors and dramatists who could perform something uniquely Irish. In his journals *Beltane* and *Samhain,* as we shall see, Yeats attempted to define what was uniquely Irish in theatre.

In 1903 Yeats found enough different productions, both from his Irish Literary Theatre and in the Fay Brothers' company, known as the National Theatre, to be able to make some generalizations in his journals about how Irish theatre was developing. Furthermore, he was able to compare works in Gaelic to those in English, as there was enough of each to have something to discuss by this time. Although Irish professional theatre was very much in its infancy at this point, it was growing exponentially and Yeats was seeing the introduction and training of acting companies and dramatists throughout Ireland. Yeats faced several challenges as he attempted to establish his theatre company.

Yeats constantly during his career in theatre found that the issue of politics was rearing its ugly head. He gave quite a treatise in *Samhain* against political expectations of art. "[W]e must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause" (*Controversies,* 45). Yeats was speaking specifically about art whose purpose is propaganda but he did expand his comments to complaining that politics has no place in the theatre. Regarding the subject of Yeats and politics in art, Eagleton comments that:

> In seeking to replace the detestable abstractions of politics – a matter for shopkeepers and shameless women – with the concretions of myth and image, [Yeats] seems unaware that this is just another form of politics – that a conservative politics is usually one which denies the very category of the political itself (308).

Yeats is earlier described by Eagleton as being "on the radical right" (301) due to his tendency to deny the political nature of his own work.

While I agree with Eagleton regarding Yeats' political leanings in attempting to depoliticize his work and create art for art's sake, I find that Yeats was, however, a liberal-minded advocate for free speech. Although in his attempts to extricate his theatre from the clutches of those who would use it as a tool of the Irish Cause, Yeats constantly found himself at odds with the Irish political community, Yeats insisted on the right of artists to express themselves on the stage. His own play, *Countess Cathleen* was vilified because it portrayed an Irish woman who sold her soul to the devil (albeit to save her people but this fact was unimportant to those who were shocked by the play). When Abbey playwrights like Synge and O'Casey faced public hostility for their productions, just as Yeats had with *The Countess Cathleen,* he stood beside them and spoke out against those who attempted to make it impossible to perform these plays. On the other hand it made him a very politically conservative individual who felt he could ignore the issues of where the money for his Abbey theatre came from, as will be seen.

In helping to establish the Abbey Theatre and regularly publishing on his theatrical forays Yeats earned and arranged for himself a permanent position in Irish and world theatre history. Although Yeats himself eventually saw the Abbey as a failure as it never met his particular goals for Irish theatre in his lifetime, the fact remains that, as James W. Flannery points out:

> By helping to achieve an international recognition for Irish dramatists and

> by showing them that they could write out of the life and tradition of Ireland without distorting their characters into "stage Irishmen" for the sake of foreign audiences, the Abbey Theatre realized one of the primary ambitions of its founders: that of raising the dignity of Ireland (357).

In considering Yeats and his reputation as a dramatist, his importance to Irish drama as a whole must be considered. It is not however as simple as some sources would suggest. For example, the first entry in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* is 'Abbey Theatre'. It reads in part "[t]he Dublin theatre by whose name the Irish National Theatre Society Ltd is popularly known. The Society's predecessors were the Irish Literary Theatre [...] founded by W.B. Yeats, Augusta Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and George Moore; and the Irish National Dramatic Company of Frank and Willie Fay" (Maxwell, et al, 1). Clearly, Yeats is accepted as one of the founding members of the Abbey and its initial Theatre Society. This clearly puts Yeats in an important position, but only if one accepts the centrality of the Abbey to Irish theatre history.

Yeats started out mentioning the Irish National Theatre Society in *Samhain* in 1903 while reviewing the year's theatrical productions. "Though one welcomes every kind of vigorous life, I am, myself, most interested in 'The Irish National Theatre Society,' which has no propaganda but that of good art" (*Controversies,* 37). From this point on in his article, Yeats uses the pronoun "us" when referring to this Society. This is how he first introduces his involvement in this organization to his readers, as almost an afterthought to the other remarks he had on that year's Irish theatre offerings. Hereafter, the plight, productions and reviews of this company are featured more and more prominently in Yeats' writing until they are central to his discussion of Irish theatre as a whole.

There is some controversy over the assumption that Yeats and his Abbey were as central as they are portrayed in *Samhain* to Irish theatre at that time. In her book *Ireland's National Theaters – Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement,* Mary Trotter questions the dominant creation story of Irish theatre. She attacks a prevailing image of how Irish nationalist theatre developed. Trotter complains that the traditional story of the beginnings of this theatrical movement is "a narrative that focuses on the Irish Literary Theatre (1899-1901) and the company that became the National Theatre Society, Ltd. - that is, the Abbey theatre (1903-present). " (xiv) Three years after Yeats helped found the Irish Literary Theatre (in 1899) W. B. Yeats wrote: "we can claim that a dramatic movement which will not die has been started" *(Controversies,* 4). He was both right and wrong. When the three years of the Irish Literary Theatre's "experiment" (18) ended, Yeats went on to help found the Irish National Theatre Society. Now known as the Abbey Theatre, it continues to this day. Indeed there have been since 1966, when the company moved to a new location built particularly for it, two stages at the Abbey Theatre. Each stage currently supports a full season. In January, 2006 the Irish National Theatre Society ceased to be the managing company of the Abbey Theatre. This means that this company, originally founded by Yeats and his friends, officially managed the Abbey for more than 100 years (1903-2006). The Abbey continues to have the same founding principles as the Irish National Theatre Society did:

> - To promote and develop new Irish plays and thereby create a repertoire of Irish Dramatic Literature
> - The guardianship of the Irish repertoire through the reanimation of Irish writing already in existence
> - The enrichment of that repertoire through the presentation of masterworks of world literature
> - To be the guarantor of continuity and vitality in the Irish theatre through the employment, promotion, training and development of Irish theatre artists and practitioners. (The Abbey Theatre website, www.abbeytheatre.ie.index.html)

When William Butler Yeats, Edward Martyn and Lady Augusta Gregory founded the Irish Literary Theatre their goal was to "combine Ireland's rich cultural legacy with the latest European theatrical methods" (Trotter, 1). Yeats also wanted his theatrical focus to be on the playwright. His chief concern with the contemporary actor-manager model of theatrical management was with the role of the playwright:

> Yeats dismissed the would-be poetic dramatists of the early nineteenth

> century [...] because, as poets, they had violated a basic principle of their calling: they had written down to their audience, "the general public", instead of for their own higher selves. Or, to put it another way, they had thought of the theatre as outside the general movement of literature (Flannery, 138).

This issue of theatre as art versus theatre as show business appears again in the comments of theatre professionals who have produced Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* in chapter six. As Flannery points out, the issue was of great importance to Yeats himself and he was on the side of creating theatre as art. He lived to be disappointed, however, by an audience that was looking for theatre as show business or as chiefly entertaining. To Yeats it was essential to maintain theatre's position as art, not as a tool of political propaganda nor as an amusement for the uneducated. This is part of why he created the plays in question, to find an audience that he felt was worthy of both his medium of theatre as art and his message of Ireland's mythic past as inspiration for the present.

As seen above, the goals of the Literary Theatre were, as Mary Trotter quotes from the newspaper the *Irish Daily Independent*: "to embody and perpetuate Irish feeling, genius and modes of thought" (1). Trotter continues her quotation from *the Independent:* "The Irish Literary Theatre was one, an important one, but still only one of the many agencies which were at work in trying to create a new Ireland, proceeding upon national lines" (1). This thesis, that Yeats' theatre companies were not the only thing happening in Irish theatre at the time, is central to her book and to the subject at hand. As I will reveal in more detail below, Trotter's thesis drastically impacts my original subject of Yeats' importance to Irish drama. Trotter questions the supremacy of Yeats' Irish Literary Theatre and his Irish National Theatre which later became the Abbey Theatre. Trotter is, in my experience, the only person I have seen raise this question. Most other editors and critics I have encountered tend to simply follow the Irish Literary Theatre straight through to the Abbey as an unbroken line. In *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats,* Bernard O'Donoghue speaks of 'Yeats and the drama' "[a]s one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre, which developed into the Abbey, and as one of its directors who remained involved in its programs for over a quarter of a century (102)." This is about all O'Donoghue really has to say regarding the historical background of the founding of the Abbey. I find that this is fairly typical and Yeats' position as a founder of the Irish theatre in general is often treated as a given as seen also *in The Cambridge Companion to Theatre* above.

Trotter, on the other hand, is much more detailed in explaining the cultural situation in Ireland, specifically with regard to various staged entertainments and their link to the political nationalist movement in Ireland at this time. Immediately I find that she differentiates constantly between the Irish Literary Theatre and the Irish National Theatre. In *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats,* however, the two organizations are conflated in the Index as a listing for the Irish National Theatre is listed under Irish Literary Theatre. This is how important the differentiation between the two was to the editors of this particular book. To Trotter, however, the differentiation is particularly important because of the difference between the two groups. As she points out, the Irish National Theatre particularly occupied a very distinctive place in its community because of the Abbey, specifically that "[t]he Abbey Theatre simultaneously occupied multiple, often contradictory identity positions as theater building, theater company, and theatrical movement, reflecting the conflicting ideas of Irish culture in turn-of-the-century Ireland and different opinions in the movement concerning the proper use of theater as a political tool" (102). These differing positions within the Dublin community are constantly conflated currently in modern western cities which have a regional theatre company. In Edmonton for instance in 2008 the 'Citadel Theatre' refers to a theatre company which produces a full season of plays annually, a building which houses several different stages, a theatre for film viewing and a mini-conservatory and attractive rental space often utilized by wedding parties. Furthermore, the Citadel is considered one of the reasons that its environs in downtown Edmonton are called 'the Arts District' among Edmontonians. Locally, these various positions within the community are not seen as contradictory by any stretch of the imagination. While the Citadel may employ certain theatre professionals for more than one play, these individuals are not seen as members of any in-house company. They are merely employed for that particular production. The exception would be the Artistic Director who helps choose plays for each season and directors for the plays. In North American regional theatres, these various positions are considered commonplace and the norm. This was not so in the case of turn of the century Dublin.

The Abbey's position was fairly different from the Irish Literary Theatre's position which was more similar to contemporary theatre companies of its day. The major difference between the two companies, as Trotter points out, was that "[t]he actors and enthusiasts who formed the Irish National Theatre Society admired the dramatic legacy of the Irish Literary Theatre's three-season existence, but they brought their own experience, ideals, and aesthetics to the new group. They wanted to produce good plays, but they were a nationalist political group first" (105). Likewise, Trotter shows that "a strong element of the Irish National Theatre Society's early experience was social as well as political in intent" (105). As Trotter discusses, this was largely due to the importance of politics and community-building in the founding of the company. Also she remarks that:

> the Irish National Theatre Society was a kind of umbrella organization for nationalist performance [...] Its repertoire also encompassed the spectrum of nationalist performance modes [including] plays in both Irish and English, poetic dramas on mythic themes, and folkish peasant plays, and it even made room for Yeasts' esoteric performance experiments with the English Florence Farr. (106)

Eagleton points out that "[t]he Irish National Theatre grew out of the women's movement, its first performance a Daughters of Erin production" (304). This is a fact about the founding of the Abbey Theatre which is often ignored. Trotter's theory regarding the rich theatrical community in Dublin which pre-existed Yeats' efforts is furthered by Eagleton's point.

One major difference between the Irish Literary Theatre and the Irish National Theatre Society was the way in which each theatre company attempted to entrench itself (successfully in both cases) in Irish theatrical history. Trotter points out that:

> Until recently, both theater history and dramatic criticism have emphasized text over performance, leaders over workers, and high aesthetics over low culture in their evaluations of theater and drama. The Irish Literary Theatre plays in the hands (sic) of such traditional methodologies. Its plays were published before or immediately after production, whereas most nationalist dramas of this period have disappeared or, often written in Irish, are not accessible to an English-speaking audience. Irish Literary Theatre productions were written about in major newspapers and art journals in the United States and England [...] whereas other productions received international acknowledgement only in small-circulation, nationalist papers. And in the Irish Literary Theatre's plethora of easily accessible documents, its directors credited the nationalist movement for their *political* inspiration, but claimed that their *artistic* influence was

> mostly European or intellectual. (2)

Indeed, Yeats again and again published long lectures regarding the importance of art above politics or the moral strictures of the Church. Yeats stated in his list of Reforms of the Theatre, "we must learn that beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country than writing that compromises either in the seeming service of a cause [...] Truth and beauty judge and are above judgement. They justify and have no need of justification" *(Controversies*, 45).

As mentioned in my introduction, politics appear in many guises including the way in which a theatre company is funded. Trotter points out that Annie Horniman's involvement as patroness of the Abbey Theatre building caused class issues with this company.

> [S]he contributed to some of the most volatile conflicts in the Abbey's first decade.
>
> [...] Considering that the lowest-priced seat was a shilling [at the Abbey...] instead of the sixpence charged in every other Dublin theater, this stipulation created considerable controversy. Not only did the Irish National Theatre Society have prohibitively high ticket prices for much of the Dublin public, it had separate entrances for the gallery and the pit [...] The theater that was meant to unite the Irish in the cause of Irish art

> divided those people on strict class lines, "with a door for aristocrats, another door for the middle class, and no seats for the poor" (116).

Furthermore, Horniman insisted that these prices must not be lowered under any circumstances by any other group that chose to let the theatre, thus putting the Abbey Theatre as a building in the position of being exclusively for those of a higher class.

Horniman's influence may seem to have created a disconcerting and unfortunate situation in that it reinforced class-based inequities among the audience at the Abbey. As Eagleton points out, there is a long tradition behind it. He discusses the position of the Anglo-Irish within the Irish nationalist project. According to Eagleton the Anglo-Irish had

> an anti-colonial affection for the old Gaelic nobility. Throughout nineteenth-century Ireland, a democratic nationalism cast itself often enough in the language of ancient aristocracy. In one sense, the nationalist Anglo-Irish were in the process of trying to convert themselves from an elite to a vanguard – to step down from their traditional aloofness from the people, yet preserve something of that privileged status by placing themselves at the head of the army. (301)

The fact is that the Anglo-Irish, who retained land granted to them by the English crown, were the only class of Irish who benefitted financially from British rule. Annie Horniman, who was a Briton, was focussed exclusively on Yeats and his artistic goals, Horniman "did not comprehend or care about the theater's accessibility to or relationship with the Dublin nationalist community. Her allegiance was unshakably with Yeats's art, not Ireland's politics" (Trotter, 115). Here, Yeats is placed into a microcosm of the typical Anglo-Irish position. With Horniman at the financial helm of his theatre, Yeats owed its existence to the goodwill of a wealthy Briton. Furthermore, he owed its existence to a Briton with a classist agenda who insisted that her instructions be followed to the letter. In addition to dictating the price levels at the Abbey theatre Horniman also had artistic input.

> [S]he demanded artistic input and respect from the company in return for her generosity. [...] Perhaps her desire to be taken seriously as an artist, along with her affection for Yeats and her distaste for Irish politics, made her so critical of even the smallest administrative and artistic details of the theater. She was no silent partner (115).

In a way, Yeats had sold the soul of the Abbey Theatre before it was even in existence. Horniman demanded to be treated "with respect" as a result of her position as patroness of the Abbey Theatre. This requirement put the members of the Irish National Theatre in the position of employees or underlings who were expected to obey Horniman. She was more than a financier of the company.

Instead she was a full-fledged member with a final say in artistic, financial and administrative matters. Despite their hope of creating an Irish theatre for Ireland, the members of the Irish National Theatre ended up being held hostage financially by Horniman.

Perhaps for Yeats, his position as one of the Anglo-Irish was partly what allowed him to put himself in such a position with Horniman. Regarding the issue of why they leaned towards the artistic community, Eagleton states:

> It was preciesly because they were a *politically* dispossessed group that the Anglo-Irish could shift, as though by way of compensation, to *cultural* production; and their social privileges, in stark contrast to the mass of the Irish, were a precious advantage in this respect. Culture was the territory which the Anglo-Irish were especially equipped to occupy – one of the few territories, indeed, which they still *could* occupy; and they brought to it, naturally enough, the tones and assumptions of their genteel inheritance (300).

As we will see, the position of the Anglo-Irish explains a great deal about Yeats' wish with the *Plays for Dancers* to create a theatrical form for an elite, aristocratic audience. Furthermore it explains why so many of Yeats' contemporaries were poets, playwrights, folklorists, and so on. It also explains one of the reasons, as Trotter observes, that the Abbey came to expect things from its audience that no other company in Ireland at the time did.

In 1905, Yeats, influenced by his knowledge of the wider European theatre community, decided to make the Abbey a truly professional theatre, one which was based on a regular business model rather than the pre-existing nationalist agenda of allowing all those involved to have a voice. This was the final result of both Horniman's influence and Yeats' own feeling that art must exist for its own sake, not for that of a political agenda. When this change occurred, theatre workers became just that, workers competing with one another for better jobs. Furthermore, a new rule stipulated that "[n]o sectarian discussion shall be raised, nor shall any resolution which deals with irrelevant and contentious subjects be proposed at a General Meeting of the Society" (in Trotter, 119). As a result, "all but four members of the original Irish National Theatre Society resigned from the company" (119). Obviously, however, Yeats and company were able to find others to replace them.

When the Abbey Theatre produced J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, controversy developed into full-out theatre riots. When they were unable to quell those members of the audience who came out to shout down the parts of the play they disagreed with, the directors of the Abbey (Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge) finally called in the police who removed the troublemakers from the theatre. As Trotter points out, this shows that the Abbey had an unusual expectation of Irish theatre audiences of the period. "At the Queen's Royal and other commercial houses, the audience regularly hissed the villain, cheered the hero, yelled advice to the characters, and sang patriotic songs [...] The Abbey, on the other hand, insisted on solemn dignity" (126). While the Abbey's expectations of their audience may seem fairly run-of-the-mill to a 21st century North American theatre-goer, it was not the norm in Dublin at this point.

But the main question remains: how important was Yeats to Irish theatre? The answer must lie in the relative importance of the theatre companies he helped found and direct. As Trotter reveals, the success of these companies was not accidental. Yeats clearly set the stage for the centrality of his companies to the Irish theatre movement in his magazine, *Samhain:*

> Yeats did not mention [...] any of the organizations integral to developing the Irish National Theatre Society [...] Yeats included a list of plays at the end of the journal entitled, "Dates and Places of the First Performance of Plays produced by the National Theatre Society and its Predecessors." The list starts with the performances of the Irish Literary Theater, then on to *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *Deirdre* by the Irish National Dramatic Company in 1902, then exclusively the Irish National Theatre Society. With a few strokes of a pen, Yeats blotted out the complex web of collaborations that built up the Abbey Theatre, and he designed a linear narrative of the Irish dramatic movement with himself at the center of all activity (132-33).

The Daughters of Erin and other such companies and their involvements disappeared effectively. As we saw in *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats,* this linear narrative is one which is popularly believed to be correct by many critics. In Trotter's view, however, it is not entirely or simply the case.

Trotter also calls into question the centrality of the two Yeatsian theatre companies within the development of an Irish national theatre movement. As Trotter mentions throughout her book and so succinctly demonstrates above, the directors' writing about their theatre companies was at least as important an act to their continuing popularity as any that ever took place upon a stage. Trotter goes on to say that:

> The National Theatre Society, Ltd., performed vital work in establishing the Irish dramatic movement. It was the artistic home of Yeats, Synge, Gregory [...] and many other important playwrights. It trained dozens of actors and created through its performances its own style of acting [...] But although the directors may have been the "fiddlers who called the tune" in the National Theatre Society, Ltd., they were not the only fiddlers in Dublin or even the only company. Amid the intense excitement of the Irish cultural revival, the Irish National Theatre Society, Ltd., did not serve as a monument to Irish culture, but as a creator of it, a site of resistance against English domination and a forum for debating identity and culture

> within the movement. It grew out of the collaboration of several nationalist aesthetics and ideologies, and throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, it continued to change and be changed by the array of nationalisms and theatricalities that pervaded the Irish dramatic movement (135-36).

Thus, Trotter asserts that while it was not the only show in town, as many histories would have one believe, the Irish Literary Theatre and later the Irish National Theatre were still extremely important in the development of an Irish national theatre movement.

I conclude that Yeats' importance to these two companies was multi-focal. He acted as the person who was chiefly in charge of finding funding for both companies, thus creating the involvement of Horniman in the Abbey. Also he helped write the mission statements of both companies which incorporated European ideals regarding deportment of the audience, a resident theatre company (of actors and directors) and a high artistic standard for the plays into the Abbey . Furthermore, he was deeply involved with the creative vision of each company. He utilized both venues to produce his own plays, thus furthering his artistic vision of theatre on both occasions. And for posterity, perhaps Yeats' most important contribution to these two companies was in writing about them and their work in journals such as *Beltane* and *Samhain*. I would also like to add that Yeats helped develop a very different expectation in and for his theatrical audience. He helped to create a more professional theatre company in which one comported oneself in a more orderly manner than was the norm at amateur theatricals of the era. Likewise, he tried to find in his audience a group who could appreciate his lyrical mythological theatre. In all these things, Yeats was essential to both the Irish Literary Theatre and the Irish National Theatre Society. Neither of these companies would have existed as they did without Yeats. He was a main guiding force behind each of them, but not the only one.

While the Abbey Theatre continues on decades after his death and has long since developed its own new vision of theatre, its founding principles clearly reflect Yeats' priorities for his theatre company. Despite Yeats' feelings to the contrary, from the hindsight of history, the Abbey is an artistic success. Likewise in his development of an audience, Yeats was somewhat successful. Indeed, today plays that caused riots in their original production at the Abbey such as *Playboy of the Western World* are considered an essential part of the Irish theatrical canon. And of course the Abbey is a professional theatre through and through, from the behaviour of the audience members to the quality of the productions to the business format utilized. The Abbey has a loyal audience and continues to produce cutting-edge Irish drama and dramatists.

Thus, while he may not occupy the position of the founder of all Irish theatre, Yeats does hold a central and important role that cannot be ignored. The Abbey's influence on Irish theatre is a tremendous one, allowing the development of Irish dramatists, actors and other theatre workers.

Yeats' publishing also helped create a reputation for Irish theatre internationally as a professional and high quality theatre. Without Yeats' involvement, Irish theatre would still exist, but not in the form in which it exists today. Trotter allows us to see that he is not the only person appearing in the story of Irish theatre but he is one of the more important figures. Trotter has shaken Yeats' foundation as the father of Irish theatre, but she has not removed him completely from the picture. This part of Yeats' reputation as a dramatist is only slightly diminished by Trotter.

Chapter Two: William Butler Yeats' Poetic Imagination of the Drama and the **Plays for Dancers**

Section I: The Poetic Imagination

For Yeats' dramatic imagination, verse is almost always the medium for his highest reality.

– Andrew Parkin (101)

It may surprise the student of Yeats' poetry to know how much of his career as an artist Yeats gave over to a pursuit of and interest in the theatre. This dates back to 1885 at least, when Yeats had his first published one of his plays, *The Island of Statues,* which appeared with some poetry. At this point in his life, Yeats had published very little of his poetry, a notable exception being *The Wanderings of Oisin.* He had however published more widely on the subject of Irish folklore including a book which featured the story of Countess Kathleen, later to become one of his more controversial plays. Yeats is often considered to be one of the best poets of his time, possibly one of the best poets ever, but he himself saw drama as being central to his artistic life. Yeats spoke of his interest in a time "when literature belonged to a whole people, its three great forms, narrative, lyrical, and dramatic, found their way to men's minds without the mediation of print and paper" (*Controversies,* 173). He concerned himself with these three oral forms. He was looking for minstrels for "narrative poetry", singers for "lyrical poetry" and "adequate players" for "dramatic poetry" (173). Here the centrality of poetry for Yeats to all such performative forms is clear. With the mention of each form he has put poetry into a central position.

For Yeats drama was always spoken of as being but not exclusively a form of literature, as opposed to being a purely performative form. Although his involvement with the Irish dramatic movement, and the formation originally of the Irish Literary Theatre is often portrayed by critics as being an extension of his involvement with the Irish National Literary Society, as we will see Yeats also incorporated the practical aspects of production in many of his discussions of drama. In explaining the *Plays for Dancers,* Yeats waxed poetic:

> I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half-reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like the intellect but a memory and a prophecy: a mode of drama Shelley and Keats could have used without ceasing to be themselves. (213)

It is clear here that Yeats was describing the *mise-en-scene* of a production itself in poetic terms as " a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture." In writing on the speaking of verse to a musical accompaniment, Yeats remarked that "I, at any rate, from this out (sic) mean to write all my longer poems for the stage" (*Essays,* 19-20). This statement shows how much he was affected by hearing his verse spoken aloud in a way of which he approved.

Yeats' fascination with verbal forms of poetry, I believe, led directly to his interest in theatre. In a way this process mirrors one of the leading theories of the development of Greek drama. According to John Donaldson's *The Theatre of the Greeks,* one of the first forms of poetry recitation was "the recitation of poems by wandering minstrels, called rhapsodes" (50). In her book on Greek theatrical history, Jennifer Wise speaks of the *rhapsodes* as "the epic bards or their heirs the rhapsodes" (22). Based on the above descriptions of the *rhapsode,* Yeats speaks of a very *rhapsodic* image of poetry as he says "[i]mages used to rise up before me, as I am sure they have arisen before nearly everybody else who cares for poetry , of wild-eyed men speaking harmoniously to murmuring wires while audiences in many-coloured robes listened, hushed and excited" (*Controversies,* 14).

Yeats also specifically mentioned Homer speaking his verses as part of this vision. Wise calls the *rhapsode's* style "a Homeric storytelling style" (22). What I find most interesting about Yeats' description is its similarity to the actual work of the *rhapsodes*. Donaldson describes the art of the *rhapsode*:

> Seated in some conspicuous situation, and holding [the] staff in the right hand, the rhapsodes chanted in slow *recitativo,* and either with or without a

> musical accompaniment, larger or smaller portions of the national epic poetry, [...] in days when readers were few, and books fewer, [they] were well-nigh the sole depositories of literature of their country. (50)

Donaldson's description quite closely reflects Yeats' wishes for the live recitation of verse. Yeats spoke of his modern image of speakers of verse:

> they will always understand, however far they push their experiments, that poetry and music is their object; and they will have by heart, like the Irish *File*, so many poems and notations that they will never have to bend their heads over the book, to the ruin of dramatic expression and of that wild air the bard had always about him in my boyish imagination. They will go here and there speaking their verses and their little stories wherever they can find a score or two of poetical-minded people in a big room, or a couple of poetical-minded friends, sitting by the hearth, and poets will write them poems and little stories to the confounding of print and paper (19).

Thus, Yeats' ideas for the bard are clearly reflective of the historical Greek *rhapsode*. The *rhapsode* was a travelling reciter who knew his work by heart. Poets did write especially for them as well. It is fascinating to what degree Yeats' ideas are similar to the those of ancient *rhapsode*, As Yeats was not a classical scholar, it can be safely assumed that he knew very little about the *rhapsode*.

Likewise, as will be shown, despite a lack of knowledge regarding *noh,* Yeats still managed to invent a concept which was very much like the Japanese original.

Donaldson goes on to describe how the work of the *rhapsodes* helped lead to the development of Athenian stage tragedy. He explains that the poems recited by the *rhapsodes* "were the models which the Athenian tragedians proposed to themselves for their dialogues. They were written in the same metre, the same moral tone pervaded both, and, in many instances, the dramatists have borrowed not only the ideas but the very words of their predecessors" (54). And further, Wise speaks of how "all predramatic poetry was characterized by the same spectacular performative elements that we find in tragedy and comedy – music, dance, costume, poetic meter, large festival audiences" (22). This is likewise similar to the way in which Yeats went from being captivated with spoken verse to being deeply involved in theatre.

Donaldson points out that there are more similarities between the *rhapsode* and the Athenian tragic actor yet. "[W]e can at once establish a connexion between the worship of Bacchus and the rhapsodic recitations" (56). The rites of the god Dionysus or Bacchus were an essential aspect of the Athenian theatre festival in that the festival was merely a portion of the annual Bacchanalia.

Eventually, the similarities between the *rhapsode* and the tragedian led from Yeats' imagined audience-filled room to the stage. The key to this move is for many theorists a man named Thespis. His importance, as Donaldson tells it, is that "Thespis is stated to have introduced an actor for the sake of resting the Dionysian chorus" (59) and that "He invented a disguise for the face by means of a pigment, [...] and afterwards constructed a linen mask, in order, probably, that he might be able to sustain more than one character" (59). For Yeats the mask as a symbol was extremely important both to theatre and to life in general.

> Yeats applied the doctrine of the mask to his entire involvement in the theatre. His conception of tragedy was born out of the continuous dialectic between opposites that warred within his mind – the dialectic being given an external form and meaning through the discipline of the mask. In turn, he sought for a style of acting, speech, and stage décor that, like his personal mask, would exhibit a formal austerity so as gradually to expose the more passionate life beneath. (Flannery, 15)

Thespis not only introduced the fundamental principles of theatre such as a single actor, makeup and mask to Greek traditional choral performances, but "it would appear that he was also a rhapsode" (Donaldson, 60). However, as Donaldson further points out,

> he went a step farther: his rhapsode, or actor, [...] did not confine his speech to mere narration; he addressed it to the chorus, which carried on with him [...] a sort of dialogue. The chorus stood upon the steps of the

> [...] altar of Bacchus; and in order that he might address them from an equal elevation, he was placed upon a table [...] which was the predecessor of the stage. (60)

Yeats' fascination with drama matured. He started with an interest in the recitation of lyric poetry. Soon he was incorporating such concepts as acting and mask. Like Thespis he was soon a creature of the theatre as not long after this he started writing plays for the stage. Yeats in fact became so entrenched in the theatre, that he wrote plays for his entire adult life..

For Yeats the centrality of the spoken word never left him and he seemed always to be looking for ways to keep the minstrel in the theatre. When he managed to get the Abbey Theatre, Yeats wrote: "I have begun my real business [theatre]. I have to find once again singers, minstrels, and players who love words more than any other thing under heaven, for without fine words there is no literature" (174).

Thus, the poetic vision of a literary theatre was central to Yeats' theatre aesthetic. Although this was true in that Yeats had the expectations of a poet of his audience and fellow theatre professionals, it was not true in the sense of treating drama as a form of literature to be read and not played. As seen above, from the very start in fact Yeats was finding the dramatic potential in poetry, rather than looking to insert poetry into drama. It seems to me that for Yeats, as for the ancient Greeks, poetry was already present and pervasive and theatre fit into this pre-existing poetic template.

Section II: **Noh *Drama and Yeats'* Plays for Dancers**

Yeats' interest in a traditional Japanese theatrical style, known as *noh* drama, was instrumental in his creation of the *Plays for Dancers*. Long before Yeats started writing *At the Hawk's Well*, the first of his *Plays for Dancers* in 1913, he was considering a new form of drama and how it would work. In 1903, he gave a speech outlining the goals of the Irish National Theatre Society. They were, according to Richard Taylor:

> 1 To present plays that generate intellectual excitement.
> 2 To make speech even more important than gesture.
> 3 To simplify acting technique.
> 4 To simplify both the form and colour of scenery and costume. (3)

There were similarities in aims between *noh* and Yeats' drama as will be shown in this chapter.

Donald Keene, a noted expert on Japanese traditional theatre, states that when *noh* was being defined as a genre by its most important dramatist Zeami, he

> especially delighted in literary display, even when it led to a static dramatic situation [...] With Zeami No attained its classic form and its highest level of literary distinction. Although Zeami also composed some works in a realistic manner, his plays are known especially for their *yugen*, a haunting poetic quality both in language and in the overall effects. *Komachi at Sekidera (Sekidera Komachi)* is perhaps the supreme example of *yugen* in No. There is almost no plot to the play [...] and the *shite* is virtually immobile during the first hour of the performance, but the poetry and the atmosphere it creates make this play incredibly moving. (7)

Zeami had been able to create deeply affecting poetic drama in *noh,* but Yeats in his own theatrical work was continually accused of desiring a very *noh*-like "monotonous chant" from his actors, but he replies "that is not true, for though a monotonous chant may be a safer beginning for an actor than the broken and prosaic speech of ordinary recitation, it puts me to sleep none the less" *(Controversies,* 47). Such accusations immediately put me in mind of Zeami and his aesthetic of *yugen.* It seems that in his attempts to get actors to speak verse in a less realistic fashion, Yeats found himself misunderstood. However, what he was attempting to do was to achieve a delicate balance on the stage which, while not boring still allowed the beauty of his verse to shine through unhindered by the usual stage conventions. It seems to me that Yeats' search for such a delicate aesthetic is similar to Zeami's quest for *yugen* in *noh.* Here is one of many examples of how Yeats' ideal of theatre, predating his exposure to *noh* by Ezra

Pound, demonstrates some very *noh*-like aspects to it.

As seen above, poetry was essential to Yeats' vision of theatre. This is true also of the *noh*. As Keene observes:

> No is deeply concerned with Japanese poetic traditions. Not only are many poems embedded in the dialogue, but poetry itself is the subject of such plays as *Komachi at Sekidera* [...] It would not be normal for characters in a European drama to relate the principles of the art of poetry and give examples of favorite works, but this is precisely what we find in these plays (15).

Furthermore, "Zeami emphasized poetry to the actors. He said that the poetry used needed to be familiar to the audiences in order to be effective, and that actors should study poetry to help them give a more elegant and graceful aspect to the delivery of their lines" (author unknown, Noh website, http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/japan/jnoh.html). Yeats also incorporated the less secular aspects of *noh* into his ideas of drama. Richard Taylor in *The Drama of W.B. Yeats*, states that Yeats had

> a conception of theatre as ritual, a demonstration or celebration of cosmic forces which condition the reality of daily life. Ritual drama is above all a group art in which historical or mythological events are both recreated and

> their significance for the community is emphasized through the focus of aesthetic structuring [...] the importance of the form is in the revelation of 'what is' or 'what should be' in terms of the public good, a demonstration of the touchstone and ordering principle on which the stability of the community rests. (2)

In the case of *noh,* the basis for the ritual aspects is in *zen.* In an article published in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, Cheryl Nafziger-Leis discusses the changes that took place in *noh* during Zeami's time:

> A significant turning point in the development of Noh occurred [...] when Noh performers came under the patronage of the shogunal court, which was also a patron of Zen. The Zen-mi, or taste for Zen, of the court audience came to be reflected by the performance artists. Their art gradually incorporated many aspects of Zen aesthetics and developed into the subtle and graceful dance and music drama we know today as Noh. Thus, key to understanding Noh drama is an understanding of the religious tradition in whose context the art form evolved. (2)

Religion then is a part of *noh.* In his book on *Zeami and His Theories of Noh Drama,* Masaru Sekine discusses the deep influence of *zen* on *noh:*

> Ze-Ami's idea of reaching to nothingness [...] is in fact highly positive.

> Nothingness, in the *Zen* sense, means the complete negativity of selfhood in which the ego becomes at one with the universe. Here, Ze-Ami is preaching complete unity of the actor with all that exists as the best method of achieving success. In this, as in more obvious religious connotations, Ze-Ami discloses the inherent spirituality of his art, and shows perhaps why Western minds (for example, the Irish poet W.B. Yeats) have been so intrigued by his highly abstract, deeply symbolic meter (95).

The issue with this concept is that many in the West, including W.B. Yeats, know nothing of the Japanese language and therefore cannot possibly appreciate Zeami's meter. The "more obvious religious connotations" to which Sekine refers are in the actual text of Zeami's plays. Sekine explains the difference between Western concepts of tragedy and *noh:*

> The *shite* is a heroic character caught like a fly in amber by an obsessive interest in a highly wrought emotional movement from an earthly past, a crisis such as sudden death, unplacated vengeance or distressed love. This moment, or crucial phase is evoked as being externally in the mind of the *shite* preventing his or her soul's evolution or dissolution into grace. There is not, however[,] the sense often present in western tragedies that an injustice cannot be righted. The contemporary Buddhist belief in prayer as a release from torment, as part of a hopeful regenerative process, is frequently symbolized by the *waki* being a monk. Blessing the central

> character, he releases him[/her] from the torment of an obsession, sweet or bitter sweet, with his[/her] earthly existence. (107)

As we shall see below, the uplifting positive ending in *noh,* as contrasted with the Western tragic form clashed when a *noh* director tried to put Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well* into *noh* form.

For Yeats, as we will see, theatre also came originally from a place of ritual and spirituality. Although he was not a Buddhist, Yeats' first ideas about theatre did start out with the idea of creating a ritual of religious significance. Here again is a site of similarity between his drama and *noh.*

Yeats, unlike Zeami had a Western tragic view of theatre. This fact is seen in *At the Hawk's Well,* when the chief character Cuchulain chooses the hero's way and faces Eofe, one of the "fierce women of the hills" (Yeats, *Controversies,* 351). As soon as he decides to ignore the Old Man's advice to make the opposite choice,

> There falls a curse
> On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes;
> So get you gone while you have that proud step
> And confident voice, for not a man alive
> Has so much luck that he can play with it.
> Those that have long to live should fear her most,

> The old are cursed already. That curse may be
> Never to win a woman's love and keep it;
> Or always to mix hatred in the love;
> Or it may be that she will kill your children,
> That you will find them, their throats torn and bloody,
> Or you will be so maddened that you kill them
> With your own hand. (347)

As he chooses to follow the Guardian of the Well, Cuchulain becomes subject to the fate of a tragic hero. His fate is inevitable due to his choice. The injustice that can not be righted is yet to happen but it is fated when he refuses to walk the path of safety. The son that he leaves growing in Eofe's womb that night turns out to be the worst part of his fate.

Unlike a *noh shite* character, Cuchulain both chooses his tragic situation, and faces a pre-ordained fate along with it. He knowingly puts himself in this danger in the Yeats play whereas the *noh* character finds him/herself in his/her situation as the result of something unforeseeable and usually unavoidable. While the *shite's* character may find him/herself released from his/her earthly prison, there is no hope for Cuchulain once he ignores the advice of those who know. In Yeats' *Dreaming of the Bones,* the tragic condition is even more clearly seen. Based as it is also on a *noh* play, the tragic ending in *Dreaming of the Bones* is precisely the opposite of how this story would unravel in *noh.* As is often the case with a *noh* plot, Yeats' play features two ghost lovers, forever trapped in a certain area due to their treachery in life to their people. But unlike *noh,* when the Young Man is given an opportunity to set the two souls free by forgiving them, he refuses, which leaves them trapped. Here Yeats chooses the tragic convention over the *noh* trope.

In *At the Hawk's Well,* the Musicians, acting as the chorus sing of Cuchulain's lost fate. "He might have lived at his ease, / An old dog's head on his knees, / Among his children and friends" (350). Here they act quite similarly to a traditional *noh* chorus. They comment upon the action, taking the point of view of an all-knowing group outside of the action. The *noh* chorus never represents a character within the play.

Sekine says of Yeats and *noh* that "[t]he Noh form had enabled him to mould his chosen fables for maximum theatrical and emotional effects. Essentially, the Noh formed an episode in the history of Yeats's imagination and in the clarification of his aesthetics of theatre" (21). Yeats was not attempting to write *noh* plays so much as to use his ideas about the form as inspiration for his own concepts about theatre.

In their book on *Yeats and the Noh,* Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray detail a most unusual theatrical turn-around. As has been discussed, Yeats incorporated much of the *noh* into his *Plays for Dancers,* even basing some of his plays on existing *noh* pieces. In the case of *At the Hawk's Well,* Yeats based his play upon the Japanese original *Yoro.* The Yeats play and the original are contrasted:

> The plot [of *At the Hawk's Well*] thus concerns the moment of choice that makes a hero. Cuchulain's character is revealed *in action;* his being is tragically doomed, not from guilt as in Greek drama, but from the sheer energy that makes inevitable his diversion from a passive to an active challenge from the supernatural powers.
>
> The plot of *Yoro* is not at all complicated. The *waki* sets the scene and introduces the action, which runs according to form, and, since there is no conflict to resolve, concludes in the traditionally optimistic manner of a ritualistic piece (57).

It is clear when comparing the two plays that they are extremely different but even in Sekine and Murray's brief explanation, the contrast in the endings of each is obvious. Yeats reaches for a more traditional Greek-influenced tragic ending as Cuchulain's choices damn him to a sorrow-filled life. In *Yoro,* however, there is a traditional happy ending to the piece which reflects its position as an inherently "ritualistic piece". For *noh* such a *dénouement* is expected.

An interesting experiment would be to try and re-adapt *At the Hawk's Well back* into *noh* and see how much of Yeats' version were to survive. Fortunately this is an experiment which has been conducted. When *noh* director Mario Yokomichi attempted to do a *noh* version of *At the Hawk's Well,* he could not escape Yeats' tragic ending. The Yeatsian tragic ending so pervaded his play that Yokomichi could not avoid it despite the many changes that he did to *At the Hawk's Well.* Furthermore, he did not end up with *Yoro* all over again, despite the fact that he was adapting a Western play which was itself adapted from the noh play *Yoro.* Instead, he got a production that he titled *Takahime (The Lady Hawk).* Sekine and Murray refer to *Takahime* as "somewhere between a Noh play and Yeats's play" (121). Thus, despite Yokomichi's work, he did not end up with a traditional *noh* play. Also Sekine and Murray point out that "*Takahime* is not really included in the repertoire of the Noh theatre, but is occasionally performed by actors who are searching for further possibilities for the development of their theatre" (121). Perhaps this is due to the fact that Yokomichi did not end up with a traditional *noh* play.

The *noh* version is truly an adaptation as Yokomichi changed several aspects of Yeats' piece including aspects of the characters:

> Characters in *Takahime* including Cuchulain as a young prince of a country called Hashi, the Guardian of the Well as a Mountain Spirit in the shape of a young girl, and an Old Man as a ghost. Yokomichi recognised the Old Man as the lead, and created the Old Man's ghost according to Noh traditions. (121)

These changes are quite analogous to Yeats' alterations and re-imaginings of the traditional *noh*. For instance, in discussing the moon goddess in one *noh* play, Yeats wrote, "The feather-mantle, for whose lack the moon goddess, (or should we call her fairy?) cannot return to the sky, is the red cap whose theft can keep our fairies of the sea upon dry land" (*Certain Noble Plays,* XIV). Yokomichi and Yeats have traded folklore and mythic traditions in their re-interpretation of one another's cultural stories.

At times Yokomichi directly quotes Yeats' play, but by and large he tends to change the script to suit *noh*. An important change made by Yokomichi was the introduction of names for the place at which the play occurs. Yeats' play is set in "a place/The salt sea wind has swept bare" (*Controversies,* 338). In *noh* tradition, the setting of each play is extremely important, as is the season in which it takes place. Ideally the play will be produced in the location where it is set, at the appropriate season, in order to ensure a proper experience for the audience. Of course this was not possible for Yokomichi as Hashi is not a real place. Yeats' mythical, non-realistic setting further plays havoc with the *noh* form.

Another change is the fact that in Yokomichi's version, the Guardian of the Well and Cuchulain actually battle. "The Guardian and Cuchulain fight to fierce music, until Cuchulain falls to the ground, exhausted, and falls asleep, instead of Yeats's 'drops his sword as if in a dream and goes out'"(124).

Finally Yokomichi abandons Yeats' text entirely:

> Yokomichi, instead of letting the Guardian of the Well go out, makes her scoop up the water from the well, and continue to dance. The Guardian goes out when the cloth covering the mountain is taken off, revealing the ghost of the Old Man. From this point Yokomichi ceases to follow Yeats' text (Sekine/Murray, 125).

This revelation of the Old Man as a ghost is a typical aspect of *noh* drama. One of the central concerns of *noh* is revealing one's true nature. Yokomichi's changes from here on out take the play in a very appropriate direction for a *noh* play. He leaves out Cuchulain's reappearance after leaving to go to Eofe in the mountains. Yokomichi "concentrated, instead, on the Old Man" who sings from within "the miniature mountain set" (125). It should also be noted that when *noh* uses set pieces, they are normally very minimalist and are rarely used. If Yokomichi has chosen to include a set piece here, it means he sees the mountain as central to the play because as Yokomichi's script says the Old Man "has become the ghost of the mountain" (126). The Old Man has become trapped by the well and cannot leave it. This is the reason his soul has become part of its setting. He and the Chorus express his sadness at the end of the play as he dances. Sekine and Murray state that:

> The negative feelings that finally overwhelm the chief character, the Old Man (although he has no heroic qualities), link this Japanese version of *At the Hawk's Well* with European tragedies in a general sense, as their heroes' concluding sufferings can never be fully atoned for, and put right within their protagonists' lifetimes. Indeed *Takahime* is less religious, more tragic than Yeats's original play. (127)

I find this last fact ironic because in changing the main character from Yeats' choice of Cuchulain to his own choice of the Old Man, Yokomichi has made *Takahime* more tragic in a western sense than his play might otherwise have been. I assume Yokomichi found it too much of a departure from the original to add a whole new character in the person of a monk to rescue the Old Man from his fate.

Yeats was also limited by his source in that he was unable to deviate from the tragic aspects of Cuchulain's story. This fact is seen as Sekine and Murray further discuss the difference between Yeats' original and Yokomichi's *noh* version:

> Japanese Noh plays are usually far more positive in their plots, which do not seek to limit their action to any one dimension or time span, as they profit from the greater possibilities of an optimistic reincarnational framework. In Noh plays, which are an explanation and demonstration of Japanese religious beliefs, the protagonist is usually saved by divine

> intervention, as in the form of a local deity or through the caring prayers of an itinerant monk. Souls in various forms of torment, whether physically alive [...] or otherwise [...] are helped in their spiritual evolution (127).

Again, there is some irony here because Yeats was a great believer in the "optimistic reincarnation framework" of which these two authors speak. It was not possible for Yeats to insert those aspects of his own spiritual beliefs into this play as he was working within an existing cosmology, that of ancient Ireland. Since Yeats was specifically hoping to inspire his audience with these old tales of Cuchulain's exploits, it would do a great deal of harm to his intentions to make such an important change in the original legend.

Takahime is a fascinating theatrical experiment, not so much for itself but as an attempt to produce one of the *noh*-inspired *Plays for Dancers* as an actual *noh* play. This process of adapting *Yoro* into Yeats' own brand of drama as *At the Hawk's Well* and then re-translating it (both linguistically and theatrically) as *Takahime* is tremendously interesting. Like Yeats himself, Yokomichi considered both his original material and the theatrical background upon which he was working when creating his play. Both playwrights found it necessary to be creative in their choices dramaturgically and within their scripts. While Yeats incorporated an existing Irish legend and a *noh* play, Yokomichi worked with merely one source, attempting to adapt it into the living tradition of *noh* theatre. Sekine and Murray find that neither production was successful. Of *Takahime* they say that it is “somewhere between a Noh play and Yeats's play” (121) while they have a harsher judgement of *At the Hawk's Well.* The two state that “[t]he difficulty in adapting [*Takahime]* only proves the point made in this conclusion of Yeats's heroic failure to adapt Noh plays. (121)”

I do not fully agree with Sekine and Murray's assessment ,as the meaning of the word “adaptation” is that it is a change from the original, not a slavish approximation. I will examine the issue of Yeats' success in this area throughout the thesis itself. Yeats' so-called failure here is one of the concepts which influences many critics to question his ability as a dramatist. One cannot fail at something if one is not trying to achieve it. Yeats was never looking to produce a *noh* play, only to see how this form's conventions could be useful to him in his drama. I see that Yeats has not failed and this cannot be used against his reputation as a dramatist.

Chapter Three: **The Only Jealousy of Emer *and* Noh**

Section I: Yeats Uses His New Theatrical Discovery

In considering Yeats' usage of *noh,* his limited experience of the form, and the ways in which it affected his *Plays for Dancers,* one must take into account how Yeats came to find out about the form. As earlier discussed in the introduction, Yeats found the form through Ezra Pound's work on a book by Ernest Fenollosa. In this volume which he was working on when he died, noted orientalist Ernest Fenollosa remarked that "the [*noh*] drama became a storehouse of history, and a great moral force for the whole social order of the Samurai (120-121)". This book, (*'Noh' or Accomplishment*), which was published posthumously by his literary executor, Ezra Pound is Yeats' only known experience with *noh* theatre. Richard Taylor says:

> [Ernest Fenollosa] died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of fifty-five, and his unpublished manuscripts concerning the Japanese No and Chinese poetry were eventually entrusted to Ezra Pound who acted as literary executor. In turn, Pound transmitted both the material and his enthusiasm to W.B. Yeats during the winter of 1913-14 (34).

Both Fenollosa's background in working, living and teaching in Japan for many years and his personal knowledge of *noh* seemed to make him an ideal "Agent of

Transmission" (as Taylor calls him and Pound) of *noh* to Yeats. However, as Taylor goes on to relate, there were issues with the incomplete manuscript Pound received from Fenollosa's widow.

> Fenollosa's notes were fragmentary and incomplete, never having been unified coherently [...] Without a thorough knowledge of the subject, Ezra Pound was very naturally at a disadvantage in attempting the articulation, analysis, and elaboration that Fenollosa might have supplied had he lived to undertake the complete study he envisioned. (36)

Taylor also calls the original scripts that Fenollosa worked with into question. Due to political issues at the time that Fenollosa was working with *noh,* very shortly after the incredibly successful Meiji cultural revolution in Japan there were issues with the authenticity of existing *noh* scripts:

> The soundness of any given script was highly doubtful in Fenollosa's day; it might be an outright abbreviation on the one hand or reflect any degree of corruption and revision on the other. Considering that he was not fluent in either contemporary or classical Japanese and that he completed his study of No before the methods of modern scholarship were brought to bear on the subject, we should recognize that the fragmentary nature of his notes was not wholly responsible for the failings of the 1916 volume. (43)

Despite these issues, Taylor admits that "[i]t is amazing that Pound's few generalizations on the nature of No drama are so correct, and undoubtedly his major contribution to the process of transmission was the force of his poetic imagination" (45). Indeed, clearly for Yeats, poetic imagination was the main issue. He was not looking for an accurate rendering of Japanese plays so much as he was looking for inspiration. And that he found.

When Yeats wrote about the kind of theatre he wanted in Ireland, much reflection of *noh* can be seen: "First. We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement. [...] Second. [...] if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage" (*Plays,* 45-47). Ideas and words were the main elements of the theatre Yeats proposed.

Poetry, as we have seen, was also a key to *noh.* Zeami came to be a darling of the court, and made his art of *noh* theatre a thing which nobility could enjoy, thereby creating a more aristocratic interest in the theatre was essential to him. This is why poetry is such a big part of *noh* today. As poetry was a large part of court life, even being central to social gatherings, Zeami included its courtly forms in *noh.* Thus, Yeats' first two points regarding his wishes for the future of theatre in Ireland are to be found in *noh* as Zeami made *noh* a theatre which was intellectually challenging for his audience and one which celebrated their love of poetry. Yeats goes on:

> Third. We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama [...] We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice, or from the few moments of intense expression, whether that expression is through the voice or through the hands; we must from time to time substitute for the movements that the eye sees the nobler movements that the heart sees, the rhythmical movements that seem to flow up into the imagination from some deeper life than that of the individual soul. (47)

We can also see the relation of these ideas in Zeami. Zeami insisted that a more stylized, and restrained form of acting be practised and that the actor should hold his energy in at all times, never allowing it to break free upon the stage. The result is a sparsely physical theatrical form in which every movement of the actor's body is absolutely required before it is performed. Furthermore, there are few if any stage properties of any kind in *noh* drama. For example, often a simple folding fan is used to represent several objects including a cup, a shovel, or a bucket.

Yeats' next requirement is not entirely met by *noh,* however. “Fourth. [...]it is necessary to simplify both the form and colour of scenery and costume. As a rule the background should be but a single colour, so that the persons in the play, wherever they stand, may harmonise with it and preoccupy our attention”.

(48). In *noh* theatre, the costumes tend to be fantastically beautiful and intricately made. Fenollosa himself after viewing a large number of *noh* performances regarding the costumes stated that "For the hero parts, especially for spirits, they are very rich, of splendid gold brocades and soft floss-silk weaving, or of Chinese tapestry stitch, and are very costly" (122). These fancy *kimonos* would never have met with Yeats' approval. He would have been too concerned that they would distract the audience from the actor and particularly from his/her speech.

On the other hand, the stage setting of *noh* might have pleased Yeats more as it always remained the same. As a result, Yeats' idea regarding contrasting the stage setting and the costumes, to keep audience attention on the actors would work excellently with a constant backdrop. As Fenollosa relates, it is not just the actors who are framed as well as possible by the background on the *noh* stage:

> The painting of the pine tree on the back is most important. It is a congratulatory symbol of unchanging green and strength.
>
> On some stages they have small plum flowers, but this is incorrect; there should be no colour except the green. The bamboo is the complement of the pine. To paint these trees well is a great secret of Kano artists. When skilfully painted, they set off the musicians' forms.
>
> [...]Sometimes when a pine is mentioned the actors look toward it [the painted tree]. (59)

Thus, it can be seen that with really only one exception, Yeats' ideas about theatre are very well produced in *noh* theatre. It is no surprise then that Yeats was ecstatic to discover a form which so closely suited his pre-existing dramaturgical model. It is important to remember that Yeats had these ideas originally only later to find them in *noh,* not the other way around. Still, *noh* came to affect him.

But despite the great influence of the *noh* on Yeats, he was neither trying to re-create the *noh* on a Western stage, nor was he trying to copy *noh's* style precisely. In a book on *Yeats and the Noh,* Akhtar Qamber explains that Yeats "was too much of a universalist not to see the beauty and significance of diversity. Nor was he creating anything like a replica of the Noh. He was looking for art forms that would appeal to his sophisticated, fastidious taste whether the art form came from Europe or Japan" (60).

The question that I have been trying to answer is why he changed *noh* as much as he did, particularly considering how much Yeats admired this traditional form. I believe that part of the answer lies with Yeats' ignorance regarding *noh.* As seen above, Yeats' only real knowledge of *noh* came from a very flawed book and two human filters in the persons of Ernest Fenollosa (whom he had never met) and Ezra Pound with whom he worked for many years. Yeats probably never saw a *noh* play actually performed and so had no idea of what the real performance was like. As a result, he was totally unequipped to reflect accurately the *mise-en-scene* of *noh.* Therefore, even if he had wanted to, Yeats did not know enough to recreate *noh* theatre accurately. I believe this is a large part of the reason that Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* have so many variances from the original *noh.*

At first glimpse it would appear that Yeats' intended audience for his *Plays* and that of *noh* have a lot in common. When Zeami was refining *noh's* form, he was doing it to suit a very specific intended audience.

> At the age of twelve his father and he had an opportunity to act in front of the third *Shogun,* Yoshimitsu [...] who recognized the excellence of their performances, and was particularly impressed by the youthful grace and beauty of Ze-Ami, who remained a favourite of his for over thirty years. In the course of developing his artistic talent to suit the taste of this most powerful patron Ze-Ami made *Noh* a more subtle form of drama. His association with Nijo Yoshimoto [...] the third *Shogun's* cultural adviser, who was an aristocratic, highly intelligent and sophisticated poet, contributed to his subsequent achievement in refining *Noh.* (Qamber, 13)

This process caused Zeami to create several books explaining how to act and write *noh* as well as how to win at theatre competitions. He recreated *noh* and its aesthetics to suit the taste of his patron and that of his patron's friends. This fact allowed Zeami to continue a most valuable patronage and to establish himself and his company as being the *premiere* actor and company in Japan.

Yeats, on the other hand, inspired by *noh*, and Fenollosa/Pound writes about his new ideas for an ideal audience:

> I want to create for myself an unpopular theatre and an audience like a secret society where admission is by favour and never to many [...] I want so much – an audience of fifty, a room worthy of it [...] half-a-dozen young men and women who can dance and speak verse or play drum and flute and zither, and all the while, instead of a profession, I but offer them 'an accomplishment'. (*Controversies*, 212-13)

I think that here Yeats is making a reference to the title of the Fenollosa-Pound volume *'Noh' or Accomplishment*. The above quotation originally appeared in 1919, three years after the publication of *'Noh'*. This quotation and other references to creating an "aristocratic" theatre in his introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* clearly reinforce Yeats' wish to have a patron or audience worthy of his work, the way that *Shogun* Yoshimitsu was for Zeami. However, Yeats was not writing for an existing aristocratic retinue of courtiers and nobility who were looking for a new diversion. Instead he was in an entirely different position, dealing with a pre-existing theatre audience who had certain expectations, as we saw in Trotter's work. Indeed, Yeats was specifically leaving behind an existing audience which he had helped establish at the Abbey and attempting to replace it. John Rees Moore in his book on Yeats' drama explains the importance of intended audience to Yeats' *Plays for Dancers:*

> The Noh is, at least in its highly developed form, an allusive and aristocratic art especially designed to appeal to the philosophic and religious convictions of the nobility and the warrior class, but Yeats's audience, even when aristocratic, had no such common ground – they came to see the latest effort of a famous personality and poet. The "tradition" was really novelty (more so than it had been in his plays for the Abbey), and the connoisseurs who appreciated what Yeats was doing appreciated Yeats, not an anonymous communal tradition. (197)

Thus, Yeats needed to write for this audience, one of, as it were, Yeats fans. While Zeami already had a pre-existing intended audience in the persons of the *Shogun* and his court, Yeats was forced to create his ideal audience. As Moore points out above, for this audience *noh* was merely a diversion. Yeats himself was the main feature.

So what was this audience coming to see? If they were coming to see Yeats, chances are that they were more interested in his poetry than his dramatic output. Even for many critics today, Yeats' drama is still seen as a side note to his more 'important' poetic literature. Essential to Yeats' view of himself as a poet was his view of himself as a Romantic. In his book *The Last Romantics* Graham Hough points out:

> We shall not find, then, among the writers discussed in this book any one clear direction of thought. What they share is a common passion for the life of the imagination, conceived as an all-embracing activity, apart from the expression of it in any one particular art. Hence a tendency to assimilate the different arts to each other, to allow their values to interpenetrate each other, forming together a realm of transcendent importance, for which a status has somehow to be found in an inhospitable world. (xvi-xvii)

The extent to which this Romanticism resonates with Yeats is seen throughout his work and his commentaries upon his and other people's work. Yeats says of writing "if we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root" *(Controversies,* 161). Here Yeats is clearly implying that there is an absolute to life that one can touch upon through one's writing, in this case the writing of drama. This "root" of life is what he was hoping to communicate to his intended "aristocratic" audience (161). Yeats often spoke of the fact that a writer must not write for his/her intended audience but instead for him/herself. Thus, he was hoping that his intended audience would simply appreciate and hopefully access the universal in his work.

The aesthetic goal of *noh* is quite different from that of this Romantic poet turned dramatist living at the turn of the last century. Zeami did not just embrace the demands and requirements of his intended audience. He re-created his theatrical form to please them and in particular his patron. According to Zeami, the aesthetics of *noh* are very particular. According to Nafziger-Leis these concepts are as follows:

> An important concept of Noh, which becomes increasingly complex throughout Zeami's treatises, is *hana,* "the flower" [...] *Hana* results from, or the flower blooms in, an excellent performance. The flower begins as a physiological attraction and later becomes a more metaphysical term. *Hana,* as flower, is the essence of the performance. [...]
>
> Whereas his father introduced new elements into Noh drama, Zeami raised the Noh to new heights through his refinement of the art form as it was handed down to him; crucial to this refinement is the concept of *yugen* [...] by the time of Zeami, *yugen* was commonly used to express "refined elegance". Zeami combined [...] two meanings, profound and refined elegance, in his usage of *yugen.* (13-14)

Zeami further went on to explain in great detail how these two aesthetic goals could be achieved in performance, as well as the importance of these goals, their nature and significance. In an essay, Nafziger-Leis details the links between these two concepts and *zen.* Zeami wanted to appeal to his specific audience by creating a theatrical form which they could appreciate and enjoy. He informed it with aesthetic goals which his audience could understand. He was not writing for a world audience of uninformed members but instead a group from a particular time, place and background with a specific education and culture who wanted what he was creating for them.

Yeats did not attempt what for him would have been the impossible, to create a copy of *noh* on the Irish stage. Sean O'Casey, in his commentary on a production of Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well,* complained that "Yeats' idea of a Noh Play blossomed for a brief moment, then the artificial petals faded and dropped lonely to the floor, because a Japanese spirit had failed to climb into the soul of a Kelt" (373). I see here what seems an ironic reflection of Zeami's concept of *hana* as O'Casey speaks of the artificial flower which bloomed on the stage. I do not however agree with O'Casey that the reason the production was unsuccessful was because Yeats did not properly copy *noh,* as this was not Yeats' goal. His Romantic views, his intended audience and his lack of knowledge regarding *noh* made such a goal uninteresting, irrelevant and prohibitively difficult to achieve. Instead, he used his own pre-existing ideas about drama and applied his scant understanding of *noh* to them in order to create a new kind of theatre, the like of which he himself had never seen. Yeats believed that with this new form he would be able to reach some of his goals for drama: "Perhaps some day a play in the form I am adapting for European purposes shall awake once more, whether in Gaelic or in English, upon the slope of Slieve-na-mon or Croagh Patrick ancient memories" (*Certain Noble Plays,* XIX). In order to properly ascertain Yeats' success as a dramatist, one must understand and consider his goals for his work.

Section Two: A Comparison Between Yeats' **The Only Jealousy of Emer** *and* **Aoi No Ue**

When I considered *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *Aoi No Ue* side by side, Yeats' method for making his idea of *noh* theatre suit his purposes became clear. This is extremely helpful in weighing Yeats as a dramatist. *The Only Jealousy of Emer* is the second of Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* and a sequel to the story of Cuchulain that he began in *At the Hawk's Well.* In *Plays and Controversies* Yeats states that "*The Only Jealousy of Emer* was written to find what dramatic effect one could get out of a mask, changed while the player remains upon the stage to suggest a change of personality" (332).

As Yeats has chosen to put this change in such an important position in *The Only Jealousy of Emer,* I will discuss the differences and similarities between Yeats' change and that which appears in actual *noh* plays. In particular, I will focus on the plays as they appear in the Fenollosa/Pound book, as this was Yeats' only known exposure to *noh.* In *noh* there are two main forms of costume change/character revelation. As Donald Keene explains, one common costume change convention is as follows:

> Many works are in two scenes separated by an interval. Towards the conclusion of the first scene it has become apparent that the *shite* we have seen as a peasant girl, a boatman, or an anonymous old man is actually the ghost of some celebrated person of the past or the temporary manifestation of a god. The *shite* leaves the stage and "a man of the place" (played by a *kyogen* [comic] actor) enters, to relate in response to the *waki's* question what he knows about the events that form the background to the play. [...] The interlude speech is occasionally of interest, but even when it is repetitious and almost devoid of literary or dramatic value it serves legitimate purposes: In terms of the staging it gives the *shite* time to change his costume and sometimes his mask; and in dramatic terms it enables the playwright to reverse time – to show us after the interval, which has interrupted the flow of time, events that occurred long before those depicted in the first part. (10)

Such a change in character and costume occurs in *Aoi No Ue.* In the Fenollosa/Pound version of this play, the *waki* performs the interlude speech which is actually quite short as he describes his actions in the exorcism of the spirit of the Lady of Rokujo. During this time the "Apparition" (*shite's* character) as Pound calls it, leaves the stage and returns as the "Hannya" or demon mask in a new costume. Immediately upon his return to the stage, the *shite* performs "the great dance climax of the play" (Fenollosa/Pound, 204). In her translations of several *noh* plays based upon the famous book *Tales of Genji* (including *Aoi*), Janet Goff has a much less detailed explanation of the *shite's* change. Indeed, in her version the *shite* as "The vengeful spirit of Lady Rokujo" (134) leaves the stage earlier, before the *waki's* character comes on. In fact it is unclear from her stage directions whether or not the *shite* actually leaves the stage. "[*Holding her outer robe over her head, the* shite *approaches the folded robe at stage front and then retires to the rear of the stage]*" (137). After the transformation of the character, "*The* shite *returns to center stage*" (138). Richard Taylor states that:

> Her jealousy mounts and she attacks the sick-bed which is represented by a folded *kimono* on the floor, then rushes out in a frenzy of passion. In the second scene a priest is summoned to dispel the possessing spirit, and his prayers summon forth the phantom, now manifest in its true form demoniac, horned mask and hammer-headed staff. (73)

I am unaware of his source. Therefore, the particulars of the mechanics of this change in *Aoi No Ue* are unclear to me. In fact the staging of the play has changed quite a bit over the centuries that it has been performed. As Goff reports, there was originally a carriage on the stage which reflected the very important fiasco which caused the Lady of Rokujo's original hatred of Genji's wife. Today it appears only in revivals. "Records show that the deletion of the carriage and the attendant from performances took place during the Muromachi period. The text of *Aoi no Ue,* however, has not changed" (Goff, 126-7).

Such changes in the performance (although not the dialogue) of the play over the centuries may explain the various different versions of the *shite's* change seen in the translations of the play considered above. Whether the Lady of Rokujo character changes on-stage or not is unclear. But somehow the play inspired Yeats to write a play about the *noh* phenomenon of the on-stage change. However the change should be done in *Aoi,* it is not unusual to have a change which does take place on-stage in full view of the audience in *noh.* Indeed frequently a *noh* actor will change his entire costume on-stage, if there is a major change to his character (i.e. the revelation that s/he is a demon in disguise).

In the Fenollosa/Pound book, which as earlier mentioned was Yeats' source, there is the only clear explanation of this type of on-stage change. It appears in the play *Kakitsubata "Up to this point the spirit has appeared as a simple young girl of the locality. She now leaves her pillar and goes off to the other side of the stage to be dressed. She returns in her true appearance"* (211-12). The only detail clearly missing from this explanation is that the change as it is performed in *noh* not only takes place in front of the audience, but also the actor being changed (he has dressers who perform much of the change for him) turns his back on the audience. This is the only time that an actor "backs" the audience (as the practice is known in Western theatre) in *noh.* Furthermore, the on-stage change convention occurs only in certain kinds of *noh* plays. It is unclear to what degree Yeats understood this convention and its usage in *noh.* He did, however, choose to utilize it as he saw fit for his play.

In The *Only Jealousy of Emer,* Yeats' stage convention is slightly different from the *noh* convention in which the on-stage change occurs where the audience can see it clearly. Instead, Yeats has the title character Emer "*pull [...] the curtains of the bed so as to hide the sick man's face, that the actor may change his mask unseen"* (*Controversies,* 363). Following this obfuscation of the actor about to make the change, Emer engages in stage business "[s]*he goes to one side of platform and moves her hand as though putting logs on a fire and stirring it into a blaze. While she makes these movements the Musicians play, marking the movements with drum and flute perhaps. Having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire* (363). After all this and the musical accompaniment, the revelation of the character's change takes place as Emer and Eithne Inguba react to its physical changes. Then the creature which has taken over their beloved introduces itself as "Bricriu, /Maker of discord among gods and men, / Called Bricriu of the Sidhe (365).

The change in the Lady of Rokujo as it appears in the Pound/Fenollosa version is pronounced. There is a complete change of both costume and mask. Pound even calls the character by a different name. In the Yeats play, however, Bricriu merely assumes a different physicality in the change of mask. Otherwise the change is seen more by the characters. Eithne Inguba, after bowing down to kiss her stricken lover (Cuchulain) says of Bricriu "It is no man. / I felt some evil thing that dried my heart / When my lips touched it" (364). Thus Yeats has made the decision to alter the original *noh* vision as he understood it. He has in fact simplified the character changes as they appear in the Pound/Fenollosa manuscript. As with the Pound/Fenollosa *Aoi,* the title character in *Kakitsubata* has a major transformation. Bricriu's change is mostly presented as a simple change of mask, marked by poetic description. Here, Yeats mostly relies on his poetry to describe the alteration of the character rather than a complete costume change. This reflects his dramaturgical view of *The Plays for Dancers.* "It is an advantage of this noble form that it need absorb no one's life, that its few properties can be packed up in a box, or hung upon the walls where they will be fine ornaments" (*Certain Noble Plays,* II). It is clear that Yeats considered simplification essential to his vision for this "noble form" of drama.

Now, in order to further understand how he used source material in writing the *Plays for Dancers,* I will consider the literary origins of the Cuchulain legend as Yeats adapted them for this play. As with his changes to *Aoi No Ue,* Yeats also played fast and loose with the original myth that *Emer* is based upon. For instance, according to Birgit Bjersby in her book *The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W.B. Yeats:*

> The idea developed in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* is taken from an old saga called *The Sickbed of Cuchulain and the Only Jealousy of Emer.* On account of certain contradictions in this saga – for instance, in the first part of the story Cuchulain's wife is called Eithne Inguba, but in the second part

> Emer – it is rather confusing and obviously made up out of two parallel stories, one of which dates from the 9th century, and the other from the 11th century. (45)

In fact, upon some investigation into the matter, I found that Yeats used Lady Gregory's book *Cuchulain of Muirthemne.* In her 'Dedication of the Irish Edition to the People of Kiltartan' of this book, Lady Gregory speaks of "looking for the stories in the old writings" and that "there is very little history Cuchulain and his friends left in the memory of the people" (v). This clearly shows that her famous acquisition method of going to tiny cottages and getting stories from the people was not what she used for the creation of this book. Furthermore she specifically states that

> It is what I have tried to do, to take the best of the stories, or whatever parts of each will fit best to one another, and in that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's life and death I left out a good deal I thought you would not care about for one reason or another, but I put in nothing of my own that could be helped, only a sentence or so now and again to link the different parts together. (v-vi)

Thus, it is clear from her own description that she rather heavily edited and changed what she found in the "old writings" quite a bit to make it more palatable for her readers.

In his 'Preface' to this book, Yeats shows that he approves of her methodology. "[F]ew of the stories really begin to exist as great works of imagination until somebody has taken the best bits out of many manuscripts" (vii) . In considering Lady Gregory's version, I see that she has resolved a problem which existed in the original sagas as they survived in written form. In a more academic version of the tale, editors Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover cite their sources as "[p]reserved in manuscripts dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, these sagas in most cases go back to a much earlier period, some having been transcribed from originals written as early as the eighth century" (127). In their version of "The Sickbed of Cu Chulainn," Eithne is listed originally as "Conchobar's wife," then "the wife of Cu Chulainn" (177). In a footnote the editors specify that "[i]t will be noted that later in the story Emer is CuChulainn's wife. This confusion results from the fact that this story is a combination of at least two more ancient accounts" (177).

Lady Gregory has put the two stories together rather expertly by leaving out the reference to Eithne as Conchubar's wife entirely and calling her instead: "Eithne Inguba, who loved Cuchulain" (276). In her version, Conchubar's wife goes unnamed. Yeats incorporated Gregory's interpretation of Eithne Inguba as Cuchulain's lover and Emer as his wife. This was completely Lady Gregory's invention, presumably as a method for resolving the various accounts she encountered. Both full-length books on the tales of Cuchulain also include another saga titled 'The Wooing or Courting of Emer' in which Cuchulain marries Emer. There is no mention in either version of this saga of Eithne or Conchubar's wife as such. This strongly suggests that the versions of 'The Sickbed of Cuchulain' which speak of Emer as Cuchulain's wife are either more correct or from the same time as 'The Wooing of Emer'. For me, Yeats' choice regarding the inclusion of Lady Gregory's version of Eithne is more evidence that Yeats believed in altering an original source for one's intended audience and to meet one's artistic vision. He did not have an academic or scholarly interest in Cuchulain but instead a Romantically influenced patriotic and even spiritual interest.

In Yeats' decision to make the kind of changes he did in the original Cuchulain legend, he very much follows the spirit of the *noh* play from which he takes his inspiration. The original saga of 'The Sickbed of Cuchulain' as it appears in both the Gregory and Cross/Slover interpretations is very different from the tale of love that Yeats has chosen to tell. I will concentrate mostly on Lady Gregory's re-telling as this is the version that Yeats used as his original text, despite its variances from more academic versions such as the Cross/Slover. First, the title of Lady Gregory's story, 'The Only Jealousy of Emer', is not that which appears in the Cross/Slover edition. Here it is never mentioned as any kind of title for even part of the story. According to Birgit Bjersby however, the saga was originally entitled '*The Sickbed of Cuchulain and the Only Jealousy of Emer*' (45). Thus, the origins of Lady Gregory's title are somewhat confused. It is however the title that Yeats chose.

In his rather verbose and ecstatic 'Preface' to her book, Yeats dedicates his exuberance to the imaginative stirrings inspired by Lady Gregory's work. He specifies how unimportant accuracy is to him:

> It has been [...] necessary also to leave out as to add, for generations of copyists, who had often but little sympathy with the stories they copied, have mixed versions together in a clumsy fashion, often repeating one incident several times, and every century has ornamented what was once a simple story with its own often extravagant ornament. One does not perhaps exaggerate when one says that no story has come down to us in the form it had when the story-teller told it in the winter evenings. Lady Gregory has done her work of compression and selection at once so firmly and so reverently that I cannot believe that anybody, except now and then for a scientific purpose, will need another text than this. (vii-viii)

Thus, like Lady Gregory, Yeats himself did a work of "compression and selection" on his play. His goal, as he admired in the work of Lady Gregory, was to inspire his intended audience. Birgit Bjersby details the changes that Yeats made to Lady Gregory's telling of the tale. She states that "Yeats has left out the first part of the saga (which describes how Cuchulain fell ill), from his point of view quite logically so, as he wrote *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as a sequel to *On Baile's Strand* where Cuchulain dies in the waves" (46).

As Yeats observed, Lady Gregory made quite a few changes to the original texts she worked with. Among them was some re-organization of the stories. I find it somewhat ironic that Yeats' choice to place the story of Cuchulain killing his son (the story of *On Baile's Strand)* is more in keeping with the academic Cross/Slover volume. In Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain,* 'The Only Son of Aoife' (the tale of Cuchulain killing his son) appears shortly before Cuchulain's death and some time after 'The Only Jealousy of Emer'. In the Cross/Slover edition, however, 'The Tragic Death of Connla' is placed directly before 'The Sickbed', as Yeats placed the tales. In fact, according to various versions of the tale, the boy was seven when the story occurred. According to Lady Gregory this was seven years after Cuchulain's marriage to Emer. Not all versions of the story end with Cuchulain fighting the waves of the sea. For Yeats this is the event that places Cuchulain into his sickbed for the beginning of his play.

The only references which remain in Yeats' play to the original first half of the story are poetic references to birds. In the beginning of the saga the reason that Cuchulain falls ill in the first place is that he chose to kill two birds for his wife although the birds were clearly enchanted. In Lady Gregory's version this portion appears thus:

> It was not long after that, two other birds came on the lake, and they linked together with a chain of red gold, and they were singing soft music that

> went near to put sleep on the whole gathering.
>
> Cuchulain went over towards the birds, but Laeg said to him not to go, and Eithne said: "If you would take our advice, you would not go near them, for there is enchantment behind these birds" (277).

Being the hero he was, Cuchulain of course would not be put from his purpose. In this particular case his purpose was to get something beautiful for his lady after making her a promise. The result of his poor choice is that Cuchulain falls ill after being visited in a dream by two women of the Sidhe. According to Lady Gregory, Cuchulain's good friend Laeg says "[i]t is great idleness for a hero to give in to the sleep of a sick-bed because women from Magh Mell have appeared to you, who overcame you, who bound you, who put you within the power of idle women. Rise up out of death, you who are wounded by women of the Sidhe" (283). Rather than incorporating any of this material Yeats references it poetically "A woman's beauty is like a white / Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone" *(Controversies,* 357).

Then Yeats proceeds to change the rest of the story as well to suit his goals. In Lady Gregory's telling, Liban, wife of Labraid of the Sidhe, has come to call Cuchulain for two reasons. One is because her brother-in-law, "Manannan, Son of the Sea," has rejected his wife Fand and "her love has fallen on [Cuchulain]" (280). Another is that Labraid wishes Cuchulain's help in a battle.

In Yeats' version, however, Cuchulain falls ill after fighting the sea:

> He fought the deathless sea. The kings looked on
> And not a king dared stretch an arm, or even
> Dared call his name, but all stood wondering
> In that dumb stupor like cattle in a gale,
> Until at last, as though he had fixed his eyes
> On a new enemy, he waded out
> Until the water had swept over him;
> But the waves washed his senseless image up
> And laid it at this door. (361)

This fight with the sea in Yeats' vision is a result of Cuchulain's fury as he has unknowingly killed his own son. Aoife, the child's mother, is the woman to whom Cuchulain goes at the end of *At the Hawk's Well.* Thus Yeats has made the sad doings in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* a direct result of Cuchulain's tragic heroic choice in *At the Hawk's Well.*

Indeed, he also changes the messenger of the Sidhe in his version. He has introduced a character named Bricriu who appears elsewhere in the same cycle of stories as those in which Cuchulain figures, called the Ulster Cycle. Although the cycles are not differentiated in Lady Gregory's rendering of the stories, they are in the Cross/Slover edition. However, in neither edition is Bricriu described as a member of the Sidhe. Cross and Slover, who include copious notes on the tales list him as being among "the warriors of the Red Branch" whom they describe as "a band of chosen warriors" (127). Among their number was also included Cuchulain. In Yeats' *Emer* Bricriu introduces himself as "that Bricriu, / Maker of discord among gods and men, / Called Bricriu of the Sidhe" *(Controversies,* 365). This is Yeats' only nod to the story of "Bricriu of the Bitter Tongue's" feast (Gregory, 48) in which he "set the men of Ulster one against the other" (50). It seems that he is a sort of trickster figure in the original Ulster Cycle. In Yeats' vision, he is a member of the supernatural, rather than a contemporary of Cuchulain's. Furthermore, his job is quite different from that of Liban who is the messenger in the original tale. Bricriu says of Cuchulain to his loving wife "[y]ou spoke but now of the mere chance that some day / You'd be the apple of his eye again / When old and ailing, but renounce that chance / And he shall live again" *(Controversies,* 366). Such a deal never appears in the original tale. In Lady Gregory's story Emer becomes angry at Fand and Cuchulain's affair and comes to kill Fand with 50 women. Cuchulain stands up for Fand and speaks of her accomplishments and how she fulfills the ultimate image of womanhood as it was seen at the time. Soon, however, Emer and Cuchulain are speaking words of love to one another. " 'O Cuchulain,' she said, 'I was at one time in esteem with you and I would be so again, if it were pleasing to you. And grief came upon her, and overcame her. 'By my word, now' said Cuchulain, 'you are pleasing to me, and will be pleasing to me as long as I live' (290-291). Soon Fand is giving up her hold on Cuchulain: "O Emer, the man is yours, and well may you wear him, for you are worthy" (291). When Mananan hears that his wife has been put aside by Cuchulain and is in danger from Emer's women, "Manannan came then from the east in search of her" (291). Fand agrees to go with her husband but makes no bones about her love for Cuchulain. "As for me myself, because there is foolishness in the minds of women, the man I loved exceedingly has left me here astray" (292).

There is great anger between Cuchulain and Emer. There is anger in Cuchulain at losing Fand to her husband and in Emer at her husband's continued interest in this woman of the Sidhe. Finally, King Conchubar goes to the Druids for help with Cuchulain:

> Then he asked them for a drink, and the Druids gave him a drink of forgetfulness. From the moment he drank that drink, he did not remember Fand, and all the things he had done. And they gave a drink of forgetfulness to Emer as well, that she might forget her jealousy, for the state she was in was no better than his own.
>
> And after that, Manannan shook his cloak between Cuchulain and Fand, the way they should never meet one another again (293).

In the case of Yeats' play, however, there is a different order of events. After suggesting his deal to Emer, Bricriu touches Emer's eyes to allow her to see Cuchulain as he truly is. Then Fand (called the Woman of the Sidhe in Yeats' play) appears. Emer is enraged and pulls out a knife. Bricriu informs her that "She has an airy body" (*Controversies,* 369) and cannot be injured thus. Here we have a brief reflection of the Emer of the Cycle who hopes to kill Fand with 50 women with knives. Indeed in the original tales, Fand fears Emer's knife. In Lady Gregory's version Fand says: "It was not right of you, Emer of the yellow hair, to take hold of Fand, to kill her in her misery" (291).

In his play, Yeats then has Fand dance. It is not long before Cuchulain recognizes her as the Hawk from the first of the *Plays for Dancers*:

> I know you now, for long ago
> I met you on a mountain side,
> Beside a well that seemed long dry,
> Beside old thorns where the hawk flew.
> I held out arms and hands; but you,
> That now seem friendly, fled away
> Half woman and half bird of prey. (371)

The Woman of the Sidhe attempts to get Cuchulain to kiss her, for "at my kiss / Memory on the moment vanishes: / Nothing but beauty can remain" (371). This reflects the "drink of forgetfulness" given by the Druids in Lady Gregory's version of the tale.

However, Cuchulain remembers Emer before the kiss can take place. "O my lost Emer" (372) he says, mentioning memories of their wedding. This reminiscence also relates to the original Cycle by bringing the tale of *The Courting of Emer* into the picture. As the Ghost of Cuchulain leaves, Emer accepts Briciru's deal:

> If but the dead will set him free
> That I may speak with him at whiles
> By the hearth-stone, I am content -
> Content that he shall turn on me
> Eyes that the cold moon, or the vague sea,
> Or what I know not's made indifferent. (373)

When the body of Cuchulain on the bed begins to move, "once more wear[ing] a heroic mask" (376), he calls for his lover Eithne Inguba. Finally, Yeats incorporates the "unfolding and folding of the cloth" (376) a convention that he created in *At the Hawk's Well.*

In his adaptation of Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain* Yeats tends to favour referencing Lady Gregory's plot poetically. Whenever he doesn't wish to incorporate part of the storyline in his good friend's version of the tale, Yeats will still poetically point to this plot element. We have seen this tendency in both the birds and the drink of forgetfulness. Yeats has made his choices with the text according to his own aesthetic judgements and with a clear eye to evoking the Cuchulain mythology rather than accurately reproducing it.

As mentioned above, Yeats has made a choice to alter the original story that he used as a source for his play a great deal. I stated earlier that this was very much in the spirit of the original *noh* play that he utilized, *Aoi No Ue.* Indeed, there are many changes between the original story in *The Tale of Genji* titled 'Heartvine' (which is the translation of Aoi No Ue's name) and the *noh* play as it exists today. The playwright of *Aoi No Ue* (possibly Zeami himself) chose a small part of a larger tale to bring to its full dramatic potential. Goff details some of the changes. She points out that certain characters such as the "court official" and the sorceress are invented for the play and "greater prominence given to the role of exorcism" (125). Indeed, the exorcism of the spirit of the Lady of Rokujo has been made the main dramatic focus of the play. Furthermore, Goff points out that "[w]hereas the *Genji* speaks of numerous priests performing incantations and exorcisms, intimating that they are ineffectual, the play introduces a single figure, the holy man (*kohijiri*) of Yokawa, who confronts the *shite* directly" (125-126). Also, the *shite* role, rather than being that of Genji himself or of the title character, as one might imagine, is instead the Lady of Rokujo. Genji is entirely absent and the title character is "represented merely by a folded robe at the front of the stage over which the holy man and Lady Rokujo's vengeful spirit battle"(126). The most important change is the end. "Perhaps the greatest difference lies in the celebration of the triumph of the Buddha's Law over malign forces for the play ends with the subjugation of Lady Rokujo, whereas Lady Aoi dies in the *Genji*" (126).

In my opinion the differences between *Genji* and *Aoi* largely reflect the difference between the goals of Lady Murasaki, the author of the formerand those of the *noh* playwright. Likewise, the changes highlight the difference between Yeats' goals and those of the original *noh* playwright in that Yeats was attempting to develop an audience for his work while the Japanese playwright already had one. Thus, the *noh* play focuses on having a *zen* resolution whereas Yeats focuses instead on adding a more tragic note to the story, at least for poor Emer. In Yeats' original Irish source, Emer's story ends rather happily, with her and her husband reconciling. But in Yeats' version Emer is forced to turn away all hope of ever enjoying Cuchulain's love again in order to preserve his life. While Emer gives up everything for love, the Lady of Rokujo viciously attacks Genji's lover out of vengeance and anger. Emer even invites Cuchulain's lover Eithne to attempt to rouse her husband, in the hopes that this will save him. Emer and the Lady of Rokujo are very different characters.

There are, however, similarities. The Lady of Rokujo in *The Tale of Genji* was in fact not nearly so hateful and spiteful a character as appears in *Aoi.* In *Genji* as she deals with her sorrow at the seeming end of her relationship with Genji and the scandal that has accompanied it, she must deal with rudeness on the part of Genji's wife at a large public event. As a result of the stress incurred by this event, she "fell physically ill" (Murasaki, 165). Later Aoi No Ue "seemed to be in the grip of a malign spirit" (165). As it is told in the *Genji,* it appears that the Lady of Rokujo in fact was unaware that she might be possessing Aoi No Ue:

> The malign spirit was more insistent, and Aoi was in great distress. Unpleasant rumours reached the Rokujo lady, to the effect that it might be her spirit or that of her father [...] Though she had felt sorry enough for herself, she had not wished ill to anyone; and might it be that the soul of one so lost in sad thoughts went wandering off by itself? She had, over the years, known the full range of sorrows, but never before had she felt so utterly miserable. There had been no release from the anger since the other lady had so insulted, indeed behaved as if she did not exist. More than once she had the same dream: in the beautifully appointed apartments of a lady who seemed to be a rival she would push and shake the lady, and flail at her blindly and savagely. It was too terrible. Sometimes in a daze she would ask herself if her soul had indeed gone wandering off. [...] It was common enough for the spirits of the angry dead to linger on in this world. She had thought them hateful, and it was her own lot to set a hateful example while she still lived. She must think no more about the man who had been so cruel to her. But so to think was, after all, to think. (167)

It is clear that her love for Genji has made the Lady of Rokujo quite miserable but so does the possibility that she is responsible for Aoi's illness. In fact the Lady of

Rokujo, upon finding more evidence that she was responsible for Aoi's suffering "was overcome with self-loathing" (169). She is not, however, an entirely innocent character as elsewhere in the story she seems to be responsible for the death of others as well.

In her book on *Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji,* Doris Bargen considers the issue of Rokujo's possession of Aoi from a feminist perspective. She introduces a complicity on the part of Aoi in her own possession:

> Like members of a theater audience who recognize the role an actor is playing by the familiar actor's altered appearance, Genji correctly identifies Rokujò as Aoi's possessing spirit [..] Yet Genji's recognition is limited. Satisfied to attribute the possessing spirit to Rokujò, he fails to ask what motivates Aoi's role playing. In short, Genji sees the possessing spirit as an antagonistic force hostile to the victim rather than seeing possessor and possessed as complementary social actors. (9)

The creature in the Fenollosa/Pound version of the *noh* play is a very different one indeed. Pound calls it "truly demonic" (194) in his Introduction to the play. In this translation of the play, the character dons "*The terrible mask with golden eyes*" (204). She says as she attacks Aoi: "This is a just revenge" (201). In the Introduction, Pound has a most telling expression of the nature of the spirit that transforms into the so-called terrible mask. "[T]he 'disguised and beautiful form' is not a mere abstract sheet of matter. It is a sort of personal or living mask, having a ghost-life of its own; it is at once a shell of [Rokujo] and a form, which is strengthened or made more palpable by the passion of Awoi" (197). Considering that this was probably Yeats' only copy of this play, and his involvement with Pound as a friend and co-worker, I believe that Pound's description here influenced Yeats' adaptation of *Aoi.* Indeed this helps clarify something in Yeats' *Emer* that I found confusing. Why, I wondered, did Yeats have these somewhat mystifying characters namely, the Ghost of Cuchulain and the Figure of Cuchulain, both in masks? In view of Pound's comments, however, these characters start to make sense. The Figure of Cuchulain is in fact Bricriu. He is called the Figure of Cuchulain because as Emer points out, he has "dared to lie/Upon Cuchulain's bed and take his image" *(Controversies,* 365). But as with the "Apparition" and the "Hannya" as they are termed in the Fenollosa/Pound translation, the Figure of Cuchulain and the Ghost of Cuchulain must be carefully differentiated by the changing of a mask. While both the body of Cuchulain and his Ghost character wear what Yeats terms " an heroic mask" (358) the Figure has "a distorted face" (365). Thus like the Apparition and the Hannya, these versions of Cuchulain have "a ghost-life" of their own as "personal and living mask[s]" (Pound, 197).

Despite the differences between the Yeats play and the *noh* play, there is a similarity in the theme of feminine jealousy. While the Lady of Rokujo and Aoi are rivals for Genji's love, Yeats has Emer and Eithne putting aside their jealousy to work together for their beloved Cuchulain. However, the theme of jealousy continues between the Woman of the Sidhe and Emer as Cuchulain chooses one over the other. As Cuchulain is about to kiss the Woman of the Sidhe and receive her gift of forgetfulness, he stops himself and speaks:

> O Emer, Emer.
> WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. So then it is she
> Made you impure with memory.
> GHOST OF CUCHULAIN. Still in that dream I see you stand,
> A burning wisp in your right hand,
> To wait my coming to the house,
> As when our parents married us.
> WOMAN OF THE SIDHE. Being among the dead you love her
> That valued every slut above her
> While you still lived. (372)

Yeats has definitely adapted and freely changed both the *noh* play from which he took the idea of changing persona and Lady Gregory's interpretation of old Irish myths regarding Cuchulain. He used ideas that he found useful and relevant to his own and moved them around a great deal as seen above. As he praises the actions of his friend Lady Gregory in her re-creation of ancient Irish stories, so Yeats takes "the best bits out of many manuscripts" so as to make his plays "exist as great works of imagination" (in Gregory, vii). The issue of the playability of

Yeats' "great works of imagination" remains, however, to be further examined but I can state that in his poetic references to Lady Gregory's Cuchulain legends, Yeats has successfully incorporated poetry into the original tale.

Chapter Four: **Noh** *and Yeats' Dramatic Vision*

As part of my goal of investigating Yeats as a dramatist through his *Plays for Dancers*, I will focus now on how Yeats used *noh* specifically in his first of these plays, *At the Hawk's Well.* To begin, as previously established, Yeats' writing all originated from his position as a poet. In speaking of his goals in 1901, many years before the first of the *Plays for Dancers* appeared, Yeats made a relevant statement. "I want to put old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse it will matter less to me henceforward who plays them than what they play, how they play. I hope to get our heroic age into verse" (*Controversies,* 9). As is clear from this and many other quotations from Yeats on the subject, chief among his concerns were verse form and how his plays would be produced. From his use of the word "if" above , it is obvious that whether or not Yeats were to make his verse into plays was less important to him than their being verse.

Indeed, in Yeats' opinion, verse plays would help differentiate Irish plays from English drama. He said "[i]f [...] we busy ourselves with poetry and the countryman [or woman], two things which have always mixed with one another in life as on the stage, we may recover, in the course of years, a lost art which, being an imitation of nothing English, may bring our actors a secure fame and a sufficient livelihood" (33). Clearly Yeats considered the use of verse in drama, as being both of artistic importance and as having a practical value. If something as essentially Irish (as Yeats saw it) as verse could be incorporated into his Irish

Dramatic Movement, particularly in combination with the countrywo/man, it might help cement a place for Irish theatre which would benefit its practitioners artistically as well as financially.

Flannery states that there is more than poetry that was of importance to Yeats. He mentions that there were "four aspects of Irish life that moved him most: the physical beauty of the land; the Irish peasantry; traditional Irish music, poetry, and supernatural and legendary lore; and Irish nationalism" (66). As we see above in Yeats' own comments, poetry and the countryperson were inherently linked. Indeed, as Flannery further states, "Yeats cherished the idea that by creating an Irish theatre he might bring the countryman's [or woman's] sacred reverence for the land to the city" (69). When speaking of the Norwegian National movement and its maxim, "To understand the saga by the peasant and the peasant by the saga" (*Controversies,* 140), Yeats had more to say on the subject of the Irish peasant. "Ireland in our day has rediscovered the old heroic literature of Ireland, and she has rediscovered the imagination of the folk" (140). Here the peasant or "folk" connection to legendary lore is clear in Yeats' understanding. Thus, it is through the "folk" themselves that Yeats believes that this "heroic literature" will be rediscovered. This is also reflected in the *noh* as the *kyogen* character always represents a local or peasant. *Kyogen* is essential to *noh,* appearing both as these peasant characters within more serious *noh* productions and on its own in *kyogen* plays within the day-long theatrical program.

Yeats looked to the peasantry to bring together all of the four aspects of which Flannery speaks. On the subject of the Anglo-Irish Eagleton states "progressive Anglo-Irish politics, which looks to some humble integration with the peasant masses, yet fashions them in its own image. [...] The peasant is 'other' to the upper-class intellectual" (313). I believe that Yeats has placed the peasant in the position of other by making him/her the key to all his four favourite aspects of Irish life. Yeats believed strongly that only the peasant could understand the beauty of the land because only s/he lived on and worked that land. Yeats felt that the peasant understood music and poetry, and the link between the two because of his/her musical and inherently beautiful speech patterns. Furthermore as seen above, in Yeats' imagined creation of the peasant, s/he has a connection to both the legendary lore of his/her land, but is also closely in touch with the supernatural aspects thereof. In Yeats' vision the peasant, as was the case with every proper Irishwoman, supported the Nationalist cause at some level. This is relevant to Yeats' dramaturgy because the playwright hoped to evoke, through his mythological poetic drama, an inspiration for every Irishman to embrace his nationalism. This included, in Yeats' plans, the peasant. Thus Yeats felt that the figure of the peasant in a play would help link any audience member to their inner Irish nature but also that the peasant viewing one of these plays would be likewise inspired.

While Yeats was re-visioning the image of the Irish peasant, he was also re-creating the Japanese *noh.* It is ironic that in placing such a high importance upon the poetic nature of drama, Yeats was unknowingly mirroring *noh.* Zeami, who largely created *noh* in the image of his patron, emphasized the importance of poetry. "One must choose words for poems which sound elegant to the ears, yet are easy to understand. If one acts while speaking elegant words, one's movements and gestures must naturally look *yugen,* elegant. Hard and difficult words do not lend themselves to acting *yugen"* (in Sekine, *Zeami,* 100). Zeami, like Yeats, was concerned about whom or what would be the centre of attention on the stage. For Zeami, as an actor himself, the focus should ideally be the *shite.* Zeami believed that poetic language could help to highlight this main actor. " Ze-Ami thinks it wasteful to use elaborate poetic expressions for any other characters, as the *shite* is the only one to create the gist of the piece in poetic terms, and to include too much poetry in the other characters' parts could distract the audience's attention away from the *shite"* (103). Yeats of course cared little whether the attention was on the actors. Instead, for him the focus should always remain on the language itself. Thus, while Zeami wanted the poetic language to be an attractive feature which would put the *shite* in the central position, Yeats wanted all the actors equally to continue to keep the poetry itself utmost in the minds of the audience.

Due to Yeats' lack of understanding of *noh,* he was unaware of Zeami's priorities. Thus, the only aspect of the use of poetry which clearly came across was its importance. He appreciated and looked to copy that centrality. It is worth our while, however, to understand more about *noh* to comprehend how it affected Yeats. Sekine explains in more detail how and why poetry became an essential aspect of *noh:*

> Ze-Ami learnt much from Nijo Yoshimoto: about *waka* poems and *renga* poems and about *Zen* philosophy as it could be applied to the arts. He developed a strong taste for the culture of the aristocracy (he had, after all, met the *Shogun* at a very impressionable age) which he brought to bear on his *Noh,* thus pursuing the sophistication and perfection of his art that he might satisfy and delight his main patron, the *Shogun* (37).

Indeed *waka* poetry was for a long time the great delight of the aristocratic class that Zeami was looking to please. It is seen throughout Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji.* Even when his wife's possession is at its worst, Genji still has the presence of mind to engage in a courtier's poetic exchange with his lover, the Lady of Rokujo:

> "Though she seemed to be improving, she has taken a sudden and drastic turn for the worse. I cannot leave her."
>
> The usual excuses, she thought. Yet she answered:
>
> "I go down the way of love and dampen my sleeves,
> And go yet further, into the muddy fields.

> A pity the well is so shallow."
>
> [...] Despite the lateness of the hour, he got off an answer: "You only wet your sleeves – what can this mean? That your feelings are not of the deepest, I should think.
>
> "You only dip into the shallow waters,
> And I quite disappear into the slough?
>
> "Do you think I would answer by letter and not in person if she were merely indisposed?" (167)

Poetry was so essential to the Japanese aristocracy that even in a crisis situation, an aristocrat would still use the popular forms in his/her correspondence.

Conversely *renga,* which Zeami also incorporated into his *noh* plays, was a later addition to court life. It was centuries later when:

> Aristocratic culture was [...] blended with *Zen* ideas, since *Zen* was the most popular religion [...] Nijo Yoshimoto, an aristocratic poet, was the main artist [...] He saw no possibility for any further development of *waka* poems and so took up the poetry form called *renga.* This had been a coarse, ironical and second-rate type of poem written by one person, or by

> several people writing in succession, for pure amusement. Nijo Yoshimoto refined it into a sophisticated art such as aristocrats might cultivate; and his artistic philosophy influenced the best of culture of his time (Sekine, *Zeami,* 33-34).

In fact by the time Zeami was writing many of his *noh* plays, *renga* poetry parties were all the rage in the aristocratic court. Thus, as he "learnt much from Nijo Yoshimoto" (37) Zeami incorporated both the more classical *waka* and the more currently popular *renga* into his drama. Yeats of course incorporated his own forms of poetry into his drama, or perhaps one should say that he worked his drama around them. Unlike Zeami he did not have to ape the poetic fashions so much as he was able to be more freely creative with his own poetic forms. In his *20 Plays of the No Theatre,* the introduction of which he has titled 'Conventions of the No Drama', Keene describes the poetic nature of *noh.* "Japanese critics have generally contented themselves with describing the characteristic style of the poetry as a 'brocade' consisting of lovely bits and pieces of old poetry [...] but the No plays clearly possess a distinctive style of their own" (5). He goes on to explain that:

> The patterns of poetry and prose vary from play to play, but they present as a whole a distinctive literary form. The frequent use of quotations is a literary convention, and a [*noh*] text which made few references to the poetry found in the famous [poetry] anthologies would seem thin and

> without overtones. No is deeply concerned with Japanese poetic traditions. Not only are many poems embedded in the dialogue, but poetry itself is the subject of [...] plays [...] It would not be normal for characters in a European drama to relate the principles of the art of poetry and give examples of favourite works, but this is precisely what we find in these plays. (14-15)

Clearly Keene is simplifying as he is writing for an audience of "the general reader rather than primarily for other specialists" (ix), as William Theodore de Bary says in the Foreword. The exact forms of poetry and how and when they are used as well as details regarding such conventions are not explained in full but merely alluded to by Keene.

As the Fenollosa/Pound volume was Yeats' only exposure to *noh,* it must be remembered that for poor Pound, there was a good deal less to work with than Keene gives his readers. With no knowledge of Japanese language and precious little understanding of the culture, Pound waded his way, sometimes rather less than carefully through the manuscript and notes left to him by Fenollosa. The only analysis from Fenollosa regarding the poetry of the plays which made it into *'Noh' or Accomplishment* is "[t]he plays are written in a mixture of prose and verse. The finest parts are in verse; ordinary conversation lapses into prose; the choruses are always in verse" (115). Quite frankly this wasn't much for Pound to go on. Thus, his versions of the plays are flawed at best, leaving Yeats in a position where he could only comprehend *noh* in a rather generalized form.

Taylor details much of the effect of Pound and Fenollosa on Yeats' understanding of *noh* in *The Drama of W.B. Yeats*. He has an entire chapter devoted to this subject. On the topic of poetry in *noh* and how it appears in the Pound/Fenollosa text, Taylor states:

> So subtle and complex a construction as the poetic text of No is easily warped beyond recognition in recasting it into another language unless due attention is paid to its original forms, and Pound often misconceived the lyrical movement and composition of the plays while editing the prose drafts. His division of speeches into prose and verse is altogether arbitrary, almost haphazard, whereas each Fenollosa draft was either entirely in prose or a line for line translation of the Japanese verse form. (38)

I certainly don't blame either Fenollosa for having difficulty with the daunting task of translating poetry or Pound for his lack of knowledge of his subject. However, I do find it ironic that despite their inability to portray accurately the rich poetic tradition inherent in *noh,* Yeats was still able to glean some of the poetry of the original form. Yeats says of *noh,* "'[a]ccomplishment' the word Noh means, and it is their accomplishment and that of a few cultured people who understand the literary and mythological allusions and the ancient lyrics quoted in speech or chorus, their discipline, a part of their breeding" (*Certain Noble Plays,* XI).

While he clearly had no detailed understanding of these allusions, Yeats still had a strong feeling for the "noble poetry" of the form (XIII). Yeats even asked himself "I wonder am I fanciful in discovering in the plays themselves (few examples have as yet been translated and I may be misled by accident or the idiosyncrasy of some poet) a playing upon a single metaphor" (XVI). Here his poet's sensibility seems to have helped Yeats discover something which was certainly not clear in the Fenollosa/Pound translations. I argue that, even while questioning Pound's ("some poet['s]") influence on him, Yeats has a sense of the poetry of *noh* and I believe this affected his work on the *Plays for Dancers*. One might argue that Yeats' wish to create verse drama pre-dates his exposure to *noh* as seen in the quotation which opens this chapter. However, the fact remains that much of Yeats' dramaturgical ideas also pre-date his exposure but were still heavily influenced by his understanding of the Japanese theatre.

Also essential to both the art of *noh* (particularly in Zeami's writings) and to Yeats is the question of speaking verse and how it must be done. In the case of *noh* there tends to be more chanting and singing than actual speaking. Indeed Zeami limits himself to discussion of different kinds of singing in his remarks concerning the training of the actor.

For Yeats, the question of proper vocalization of poetry was always paramount. He wrote a great deal about the subject and about the details of how he wanted it done. He differentiated between the theatre of commerce (the realist theatre) and the theatre of art. Yeats stated that in the theatre of art, verse would have a place.

> Even if poetry were spoken as poetry, it would still seem out of place in many of its highest moments upon a stage where the superficial appearances of nature are so closely copied; for poetry is founded upon convention, and becomes incredible the moment painting or gesture reminds us that people do not speak verse when they meet up on the highway. The theatre of art, when it comes to exist, must therefore discover grave and decorative gestures [...] and grave and decorative scenery that will be forgotten [...] and dresses of so little irrelevant magnificence that the mortal actors and actresses may change without much labour into the immortal people of romance. The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty. (*Essays,* 169-170)

Clearly in 1899 when he wrote the above, Yeats was thinking about creating some new form of theatre that would meet his criteria for the theatre of art, or at least help to create it at a later time. This thought process continued to develop and brew inside Yeats until he first discovered *noh.* At this time Yeats already had developed his ideas to the point that he wanted an aristocratic form which incorporated dance, mask, verse and mythological subject matter.

Likewise important to both Yeats and *noh* is music. As seen above, Zeami focuses entirely on music when discussing the training of the actor. "The final aim of voice training is to strengthen the voice and widen its range, until the actor can reach people's hearts and so create *kyoku,* the *hana* of singing" (Sekine, *Zeami,* 78). To Yeats also music was central to his ideas regarding theatre. When he started to think about putting music together with verse-speaking, it was as a result of his work with Florence Farr, an actress. He felt that her speaking with a stringed instrument called a psaltery was "spoken with so delicate a sense of [the poem's] rhythm, with so perfect a respect for its meaning, that if I were a wise man and could persuade a few people to learn the art I would never open a book of verses again" (*Essays,* 13). He was, however, plagued by the contemporary style of singing. "[W]hen I heard anything sung I did not hear the words, or if I did their natural pronunciation was altered and their natural music was altered or it was drowned in music" (14). He worked with Florence Farr for years on creating a way of denoting verse-speaking, but despite a great deal of hard work, they were never very successful. This was a point of annoyance and loss for Yeats as he believed strongly in the idea. He discussed his feelings about how this could impact theatre:

> I do not say that we should speak our plays to musical notes, for dramatic verse will need its own method, and I have hitherto experimented with short lyric poems alone; but I am certain that, if people would listen for a

> while to lyrical verse spoken to notes, they would soon find it impossible to listen without indignation to verse as it is spoken in our leading theatres. They would get a subtlety of hearing that would demand new effects from actors and even from public speakers, and they might, it may be, begin even to notice one another's voices till poetry and rhythm had come nearer to common life (18-19).

It is clear from the above that for Yeats music and poetry were inextricably linked. He said "[i]t should be again possible for a few poets to write as all did once, not for the printed page but to be sung" (223). This also links him to *noh,* which, while it did not feature the verse in the same way as Yeats did, insisted on a combination of poetry and music in order to enhance the beauty of the poetry.

Yeats discusses how to improve the speaking of verse. In so doing he speaks of how the human voice has had to change when it "has had to compete with an orchestra, where the loudest instrument has always survived" (223). His solution to this problem is that "the voice must be freed from this competition and find itself among little instruments, only heard at their best perhaps when we are close about them" (223). This of course is precisely what he does in *The Plays for Dancers.* As we see in *At the Hawk's Well* and throughout the other plays, the stage directions call for "a drum and a gong and a zither" *(Controversies,* 337). Thus, Yeats' solution for improving the way in which an actor speaks his verse is to improve the musical accompaniment so that it can be sung in a clearer fashion.

Apparently for Yeats there was no proper poetry without music. A mixture of poetry and music was also a big part of what he was trying to achieve both throughout his theatrical work and in *The Plays for Dancers.* Yeats had composers write music for *The Dreaming of the Bones, Calvary* and *At the Hawk's Well.* Due to their status as plays which included dances, as well as the influence of *noh,* Yeats saw the importance of including music in all these plays. Live Musicians on the stage are a feature of every one of the *Plays for Dancers* just as they are in *noh.* Music was inherent to these plays.

According to Taylor, Yeats achieved a non-realistic style in his *Plays for Dancers* through his dramaturgical choices for the plays:

> [T]he chorus of Musicians who set the scene mediate between the audience and the action, but their artificiality emphasizes the distinction between levels. Yeats's rejection of a conventional stage in favour of a bare space before a wall in drawing-room or studio is also an essential aspect of his anti-illusionism. Rather than a privileged narration which develops into a mimed presentation, Yeats's dance plays are dramatic throughout, but the action is not to be taken as mere imitation of an actual occurrence. All association with theatrical illusionism is avoided and the performance achieved the ambiguous quality of a bardic recitation in which the poet often with the aid of music, narrates, enacts and comments upon his material. As early as 1906, Yeats had written perceptively of epic

> narration, and one can see that the distancing effect of drawing-room performance is not solely attributable to influence from the Japanese No. (134-135)

Thus it can be seen, as Taylor says, that the *mise-en-scene* combination of chorus, staging area, music, narration and dance create an anti-illusionary theatrical presentation. He even remarks upon the stage space chosen by Yeats as being "distancing" which is a term often associated with such codified traditional forms as *noh.*

The group title of Yeats' plays, the *Plays for Dancers* clearly situates the importance of dance in them. For Yeats in fact working with one specific dancer was the original inspiration for much of *At the Hawk's Well.* Yeats in speaking of his interaction with Michio Ito, a Japanese dancer states:

> My play [*At the Hawk's Well*] is made possible by a Japanese dancer whom I have seen dance in a studio and in a drawing-room and on a very small stage lit by an excellent stage-light. In the studio and in the drawing-room alone, where the lighting was the light we are most accustomed to, did I see him as the tragic image that has stirred my imagination. There, where no studied lighting, no stage-picture made an artificial world, he was able, as he rose from the floor, where he had been sitting cross-legged, or as he threw out an arm, to recede from us into some more powerful life.

> Because that separation was achieved by human means alone, he receded but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind. One realized anew, at every separating strangeness, that the measure of all arts' greatness can be but in their intimacy. (*Essays,* 224)

Ito was in fact instrumental in the creation of *At the Hawk's Well,* playing the role of the Hawk in the original production. In that he came from Japan, Ito was a Japanese dancer but his training was mostly in Western dance and he never trained in *noh.* In her book on Yeats and the dancer, Sylvia Ellis speaks of Ito's early training and dance style: "Before leaving Japan at the age of eighteen Ito had undergone early training in Kabuki and this, in conjunction with his Dalcroze studies, his own natural genius for movement and his perfectionism, led him to devise a style of dance which Yeats found so entirely fitting to his purposes" (226). Kabuki is a more physical form of traditional Japanese theatre. Dalcroze's technique is a translation of rhythm into physical movement. Neither of these styles are even similar to the physical movement required of a *noh* actor. Ito's dance very much influenced Yeats. As seen above in Yeats' quotation regarding Ito's performance, both the issue of physical intimacy and "strangeness" as Yeats puts it were extremely important to Yeats' impression of Ito's work. I think that the small dance recital of which Yeats speaks affected both the choreography for the Hawk's dance and movement style (both of which presumably were created by Ito). I believe also that it made a difference in Yeats' choice of playing space and thus it was intrinsic to the writing of the plays. In particular this would apply to

At the Hawk's Well as it was the first of the plays and the one in which Ito originally performed for Yeats.

Of Yeats' use of dance in his plays Ellis makes a statement. "[D]ances in Yeats's work are vehicles of significance" (234). She further points out that "[i]n all the dance plays the dance takes precedence and has a precise function in the narrative and action; it is never merely decorative. The interconnections between the different media of the plays makes for a unity created from within and is thus arguably inherent and organic as opposed to mechanistic and imposed" (314). The unity of media of which Ellis speaks seems to me to be the various elements, the *noh*-like elements that Taylor observes above. As music and poetry are one to Yeats, so the playing space, the music and the dance all work together. Likewise, Ellis' description of the position that the dance occupies in Yeats' *Plays for Dancers* reminds me of its use in *noh*. In the traditional Japanese form, the dance expresses the climactic moment of the play. The *shite* dances his character's sorrow, anger or fear. His dance culminates in the dramatic stamp which marks the only moment when a *noh* actor lifts his foot from the floor. The sound of the stamp is amplified through the careful construction of the *noh* stage which incorporates large jugs underneath to increase the volume. This shows the centrality of the climactic dance and stamp in *noh*.

In the case of the *Plays for Dancers,* Yeats' final aesthetic goal was to "enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation" (*Essays,* 225). Because this was the goal, theatrical intimacy was a requirement. "As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise" (225). Although this is a very difficult and rather lofty goal for a play, it is certainly not impossible in a selection of plays inspired by a form like *noh.* As will be seen in chapter six, theatrical intimacy and *noh* techniques have worked together to create a production of *Dreaming of the Bones*. Also to what degree Yeats' deeper goal in reaching the "deep of the mind" has been achieved will be considered.

Chapter Five- Critical Responses to Productions of Yeats' **Plays for Dancers**

Section I: Productions of **At the Hawk's Well** *During Yeats' Lifetime*

Part I – Original Performance, 1916, Lady Emerald Cunard's Drawing Room

In this chapter I intend to consider some initial reactions to *At the Hawk's Well* and compare them with reviews from productions after Yeats' lifetime. The first thing I discovered in my laborious search for reviews of the original productions of the *Plays for Dancers* is that they are very few and far between. After some thought I realized that the original staging, particularly for *At the Hawk's Well,* was at least partially to blame for this. Akhtar Qamber describes this event "The first performance took place in London on April 2, 1916, in Lady Cunard's drawing room before a very select audience [...] No drama critics or photographers were admitted. Yeats took great pleasure in telling a news photographer who had planted his camera in the drawing room that 'we did not invite the press'" (77). This has resulted in, as far as I can tell, a complete lack of proper reviews of this performance. Indeed, the only written reaction to this particular performance which I was able to find was a very short response by Edward Marsh who was a regular guest in Lady Cunard's home:

> I was getting quite worked up and impressed. I find I can manage quite well without *any* scenery at all, but they had been a little too careful not to disturb the room, and I couldn't help being disconcerted, just when I had

> persuaded myself that I had before me a wild mountain track of semi-historic Ireland to notice the characters skirting round a Louis XV table covered with French novels. The actors wore masks made by Dulac, awfully good and I found it quite easy to accept the convention. (in Fielding, 71)

Regrettably by his own admission, Marsh did not see the entire production. There is frankly precious little for me to comment on. All I can glean from this short piece is that for Marsh the non-realistic staging technique utilized by Yeats in this - his very first production of any of the *noh*-inspired plays - was both successful and unsuccessful. Marsh found the lack of scenery and usage of masks "easy to accept" and the decision to leave the room's original furnishings largely undisturbed and simply to act around them "disconcerting".

I was forced to widen my parameters for more material. I decided to include any production in which Yeats himself may have had a hand. Thus, I turned to two separate drawing room productions of *At the Hawk's Well* that Yeats helped initiate.

Part II – 1924, William Butler Yeats' Drawing Room at 24 Merrion Square

One production was in Yeats' own drawing room at his home at 24 Merrion Square in 1924. For this production my source is someone referring to themselves only as SLM. I felt that this was insufficient for my needs and enquired further. This particular account was published in the April 1924 edition of the journal *The Irish Statesman,* which was apparently a favourite newspaper of Yeats'. In my research, I found evidence in Susan L. Mitchell's biography *Red-Headed Rebel* by Hilary Pyle that she was SLM. This book features quotes from SLM's remarks as they appear in the *Statesman*, which are attributed to Mitchell.

In her 'Impression' of the production, Mitchell states:

> It is very difficult when one's imagination has been taken captive by an unusual beauty, as it was by Mr. Yeats' *At the Hawk's Well*, performed recently in his drawing room, to analyse one's ideas or order them in any way. For in this performance the most intimate speech of humanity, poetry, comes to us with overpowering reinforcement of music and dancing in, I suppose the most direct way possible for imagination to conceive. (142)

Mitchell then goes on to discuss her understanding of *noh* - although she does not explain her source for this knowledge - and its link to this production. Pyle shows no circumstances under which Mitchell might have been exposed to *noh.*

> The idea in the *Noh* play seems to be the opposite of all that is desirable in realistic drama. Action is lowered, emotion lifted away from its natural

> expression, gesture indicated but not fully expressed. Life moves in shadows that seem even fainter than those in the mirror of *The Lady of Shalott.* Everything that took place on that small stage in Mr. Yeats' drawingroom seemed slowed, as the pulse might be slowed by a powerful drug, conveying an effect of detachment from life. (142)

It seems almost as though Mitchell had some idea of what *noh* theatre tries to express through its *mise-en-scene.* I believe, however, due to Mitchell's apparent lack of knowledge of *noh,* that her information came from Yeats himself. Neither Mitchell nor Sean O'Casey, who also attended this production mention Yeats performing a lecture on *noh* prior to the play. I wondered if Mitchell got her impressions of *noh* from Yeats on some other occasion perhaps. The possibility also remains that she bases her understanding of *noh* on Yeats' play itself. This would suggest that this production featured slow movement on the part of the actors as well as non-realistic acting techniques which successfully evoked certain aspects of *noh.*

In his Introduction to the first publication of the Pound/Fenollosa translations of *noh* plays, Yeats describes *noh* as "spectacles where speech, music, song and dance created an image of nobility and strange beauty" (*Certain Noble Plays,* X). He further describes his understanding of the *mise-en-scene* of a *noh* play, although there is no evidence that he ever saw one:

> No 'naturalistic' effect is sought. The players wear masks and found their movements upon those of puppets [...] A swift or a slow movement and a long or a short stillness, and then another movement. They sing as much as they speak, and there is a chorus which describes the scene and interprets their thought and never becomes as in the Greek theatre a part of the action. At the climax instead of the disordered passion of nature there is a dance, a series of positions & movements which may represent a battle, or a marriage, or the pain of a ghost in the Buddhist purgatory. I have lately studied certain of these dances [...] and I notice that their ideal of beauty, [...] makes them pause at moments of muscular tension. The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to which it moves, and the triumph of their art is to express the rhythm in its intensity. (XII)

It seems clear, however, from these comments that they were not Mitchell's source for information on *noh* as they show no similarity to her remarks. Indeed the above quotation shows Yeats' ignorance of the Japanese form on many fronts including the foundation of the actors' movement on those of puppets which was certainly not the case. In the Merrion Square production, however, the director was apparently successful in attempting to utilize the *noh* form and to copy its results according to Mitchell's explanation of her experience. “The poignant music of the flute echoing the verse in the hearer's soul, the thin tapping to whose rhythm the players entered, the angular gliding movements of the players, the necromantic dance of the hawk, I am powerless to express the emotions they raised" ('An Impression', 142).

According to Mitchell the director was definitely successful in ensuring that the actors were properly heard throughout the production as well: "the beautiful verse was recited close to our ears" ('An Impression', 142). It should be noted that, according to Pyle, Susan Mitchell suffered some hearing loss in her lifetime. Thus, if she was able to clearly make out the verse (which was extremely important to Yeats), it was a great success on the part of this director.

The movement as it was performed deeply affected Mitchell. She discusses how this *mise-en-scene* affected her "while the sense of beauty is solaced, the intellect seems partially narcotised by a play of this kind. If I were less under the spell of its fantastic and startling beauty, I might criticise the actors and say which of them realised most the interior quality of the play, but I am still drowsed by my experience and incapable of criticism" (142). Yeats was indeed looking to access the more subconscious portions of the audience's mind, and to bypass the more critical intellect. It seems as though many of Yeats' goals were more than fulfilled by this production of *At the Hawk's Well,* at least in the mind of Mitchell, with whom he had much in common.

On the other hand, another writer was in the audience that day at Merrion Square and it was a writer who prided himself on his wry wit in observances of everything around him. Unlike Mitchell who was a writer of poetry and a reviewer of drama, Sean O'Casey was an infamous playwright and a contemporary of Yeats' at the Abbey. His reaction to the Merrion Square production appears in his autobiographical *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well.* Although he narrates the entire book in the third person, referring to himself as Sean throughout, it is clearly autobiographical in nature. O'Casey immediately complained that "charming and amiable as it all was, it wasn't a Noh Play. Poet and all as he was, Yeats wasn't able to grasp a convention, grown through a thousand years, and give it an Irish birth in an hour" (374). O'Casey clearly had a questionable historical understanding of Japanese theatre (84 years after this production, *noh* is still less than 1000 years old) and there is nothing in his autobiographical works nor in his biography to suggest that O'Casey had any experience with *noh* upon which he could base his above comments. Furthermore, as earlier discussed, I do not feel that claiming that it is not *noh* is a particularly relevant criticism of Yeats' work. It seems surprising to me actually that decades after O'Casey's expression of this complaint, critics are continuing to parrot it despite its irrelevance to Yeats' dramaturgy.

O'Casey's comments then become more detailed. "Zither and flute and drum, with Dulac's masks, too full of detail for such an eyeless play, couldn't pour the imagination into the minds of those who listened and saw. The unfolding and folding of the fanciful cloth couldn't carry the stage to the drawing-room" (374). These comments are reflected in Edward Marsh's brief reaction to the original production as he speaks of being "disconcerted" by the fact that the actors were interacting with regular drawing room articles during the production. Apparently Marsh found that this disturbed his suspension of disbelief. Furthermore, Marsh addresses Dulac's masks and their detail. "I had an odd sensation before the play began. Henry Ainley had a mask very like his own face and I didn't know it wasn't his own self till he came up to me roaring with laughter and not a muscle of his mouth moving, it was quite uncanny" (in Fielding, 71). This comment certainly echoes O'Casey's complaint that these masks were "too full of detail". O'Casey, however, is making a different charge. He is stating that this production has been unsuccessful at capturing *noh*. O'Casey also had an agenda for the theatre which was certainly not being forwarded by Yeats' drawing room theatre. He states: "No, the people's theatre can never be successfully turned into a poetical conventicle" (374). Here he is showing that not only did he have issues with Yeats' attempt to capture a long-standing and seemingly ancient Japanese tradition, but that Yeats' whole enterprise of creating an Irish audience for a poetic drama form (of which the *Plays for Dancers* was merely a part) was inherently flawed.

Although he was willing to allow that there was a beauty which was performed before him, O'Casey remained unconvinced of its effectiveness. "There was a buzz of Beautiful when the cloth had been folded, and the musicians had taken their slow way from the room; and Sean wisting not what to say himself, added Very" (374). O'Casey's next comments may explain some of his inability to enjoy the play. "Sean tried to murmur a few remarks, but no head turned to listen and the chatter went on as if he had been a wraith invisible" (374). He goes on to detail his feelings regarding the other members of the audience of which he had been a part:

> No, this trifling group of the drawing-room would never deliver Ireland from what was coming – they thought of themselves too much [...] There was no chance of a growing carnival of thought here. There was nothing in the fervency of their talk; no honour to Yeats in it; he was simply circumscribed with hesitant murmurs of Beautiful. (376)

He then compares their commentary to "a tired and unbelieving priest [...] murmuring the last words of *Missa est"* (376). Here he has shown that, in his opinion, not only was Yeats wrong in his attempt to create a poetic theatre for Ireland, but furthermore that the poet was wrong in his attempt to create or find a learned audience who would appreciate his work. Furthermore, O'Casey is charging that their comments are meaningless and mouthed out of social expectation rather than actual belief in what they were saying. Perhaps O'Casey did not speak with Mitchell.

O'Casey dismissed everything about *The Irish Statesman*. In an earlier chapter, while speaking of reviews of his plays which were produced at the Abbey, O'Casey charged that the reviews are bad because he had refused to "join them in a Club or Society" (246). In other words, O'Casey charged that the bad reviews and letters "condemning and upbraiding the plays" (245-246) were the result of revenge. In this section of his autobiographical work, while complaining about who was treating him this way, O'Casey mentioned only "A.E.'s journal, *The Irish Statesman"* (245) by name.

O'Casey has provided the only negative reaction to any of the early productions of the *Plays for Dancers* I have found in which Yeats could have had a hand. His final comment, that the piece "wasn't even the ghost of the theatre" (374), is the most damning comment I have seen. Whether O'Casey's reaction was due to a difference in artistic opinion between himself and Yeats or due to a more petty vindictive issue resulting from O'Casey's ostracization from Dublin theatre circles is hard to say. Knowing as I do about the stark realism of O'Casey's own early plays (realism was indeed the hallmark of his early drama), I can easily see how he would have little if any interest in or regard for Yeats' high art ambitions in *The Plays for Dancers* at that time. O'Casey came out of the earlier Irish professional theatre, playing in his teenage years in Dion Boucicault dramas such as *The Shaughraun*. He was involved in companies such as the Townsend Dramatic Society and the Liberty Hall Players. He even performed, as he noted in his autobiography at the Abbey when he was 15 (circa 1895). "[H]ere he was now with plays of his own showing themselves off on the very same stage that he himself had trod as a growing youngster so long, so long ago" (228). Indeed it was almost 30 years later that a 43-year-old O'Casey finally had a play accepted by the Abbey. He had been submitting plays to the Abbey for four years by that time.

According to O'Casey biographer Garry O'Connor, O'Casey had written his early plays "without any desire to preach a message or indulge a feeling of self-pity. Then he had been content to show the processes of life through living characters presented with love and without being judged. The people he created were always greater than their models" (236). When O'Casey recorded his thoughts for posterity on *At the Hawk's Well* in *Fare Thee Well Inishfallen (*one of several autobiographies) it was not published until decades after the actual production. Thus what happened after this production is relevant to O'Casey's reaction. Within a year of O'Casey's break with the Dublin theatre community in 1926 O'Connor notes O'Casey "had come increasingly to believe that the Abbey depended more on him than he on the Abbey" (225). Thus he could afford to burn bridges as he saw fit. In 1928, O'Casey and Yeats entered a full-fledged feud over Yeats' criticism of one of O'Casey's plays. The feud lasted for years and only ended at the behest of Lady Gregory when O'Casey learned that Yeats was very ill and close to death. Factoring the bitterness of this long-lasting quarrel into the mix and particularly O'Casey's hurt feelings regarding Yeats' comments on some of his work, I believe that it was largely but not exclusively ill will on the part of O'Casey that caused him to write what he did about *At the Hawk's Well.* Apart from this leftover bitterness, I feel sure that O'Casey's ideas regarding theatre as a realistic medium, with the early plays and later as a potential organ of political propaganda worked together. They placed the poetic delicacy and theatrical experimentation of Yeats' play into the category of not "even the ghost of the theatre" as O'Casey called it.

Part III – 1930, Oliver St. John Gogarty's Drawing Room at Renvyle

In July of 1930, Yeats went to visit his good friend Oliver St. John Gogarty at Gogarty's home, which had recently been converted into a hotel. During Yeats' stay, some important events occurred which included Yeats having a famous portrait painted by Augustus John and another production of *At the Hawk's Well.* Gogarty speaks of the preparations for the production in one of his autobiographical volumes *It Isn't This Time of Year at all.* "Yeats was in consultation with my wife and I was not invited to take part in their planning. At last the news broke: players from the Abbey Theatre were to come down to produce Yeats's *The Hawk's Well"* (sic, 242).

Gogarty's remarks on the production are few but telling. First he insists that Yeats appreciated the manner in which the play was produced: "*The Hawk's Well* (sic) was played even as its author would have wished [...] I knew that Yeats was very well satisfied" (246-47). This suggests that Yeats was in some way involved with decisions regarding this production. Furthermore, Gogarty remarks on the fact that Dulac's music, costumes and masks were utilized as he quotes Yeats: "The masks, costumes and the music are by my friend, Edmund Dulac" (246). This shows that at least these aspects of the original production survived to be used in this one, 14 years later.

Like Mitchell, Gogarty was quite moved by the production. "It proved to be a supernatural presentation, the like of which has never been seen before on any stage" (246-47). Furthermore, he went on to say that "I know nothing of Japan, but they could not have produced anything as satisfying and as moving for Europeans as *The Hawk's Well"* (sic, 247). This is an insightful comment. Indeed, this might be what O'Casey tried to say in his charge that Yeats had not "captured" *noh.* Instead, what Yeats had created was more satisfying to the European mind, possibly because it came from one such mind. Although he saw the production as uniquely supernatural, Gogarty was moved by the ways in which Yeats managed to alter *noh* for a European audience. In much less space than Mitchell took, Gogarty managed to fit in some very important statements regarding the play and its production at his home.

It should be noted that for the production at Gogarty's home, known as Renvyle, Yeats did do a pre-production lecture. Gogarty also includes some of this speech: "I have found a form that does its work by suggestion, by complexity of rhythm, color, gesture, symbol, not by direct statement. I have not altered basically the Noh plays that were intended for nobles, but I have made them suitable to our conventions of aristocracy" (in Gogarty, 245). Gogarty comments here on Yeats' clear flattery of the audience. Of course it should be remembered that Yeats always considered his *Plays for Dancers* to be what he termed "an aristocratic form" (*Certain Noble Plays,* II). However, when a friend as close to

Yeats as Gogarty was remarks that flattery is “what the speaker wants” (245), I tend to put some stock in his theory.

Yeats speaks of not altering the conventions of *noh,* but making them “suitable to our conventions.” This may seem a contradiction in terms in our current age of understanding cultural appropriation. However, I lean again towards Gogarty's comment that Japan “could not have produced anything as satisfying and as moving for Europeans” (247). What Yeats means by not altering *noh's* conventions must be seen as what it is: the words of a modernist Romantic. His meaning of altering conventions must be taken in its most liberal way. Yeats is speaking of “a form that does its work by suggestion, by complexity of rhythm, color, gesture, symbol, not by direct statement” (245). These are the conventions that he speaks of, not the conventions of types of actor, concepts of *yugen* and *hana* or really any of Zeami's concepts whatsoever.

Part IV – All Four Commentaries Considered

These are the four commentaries - although they are not proper reviews – of productions of *At the Hawk's Well* done in the England and Ireland during Yeats' lifetime. I have every reason to believe, based on the information I have, that Yeats was involved to some degree in each of these productions. All but one are very positive. One might even use the term ‘glowing’. It seems as though those who wrote about these productions understood Yeats' intentions to some degree (albeit Gogarty at least had the benefit of a pre-show lecture by the playwright) and saw his dramaturgical goals reflected in the production they saw. The exception being Sean O'Casey, another Irish playwright who saw himself somewhat as a rival of Yeats'. It was this rivalry and a lot of hurt feelings on the part of O'Casey which I feel influenced the tenor of his reaction. I will not suggest however that O'Casey's reaction was of a purely personal nature. O'Casey is the only playwright in this group and therefore the only one who inherently had a pre-existing theory regarding what theatre should be and should try to achieve. This theory, while it did change as O'Casey aged, never incorporated Romanticism, mysticism or poetic drama. I believe that he would probably never have appreciated the *Plays for Dancers* or the idea behind them.

Section II - Productions After Yeats' Lifetime

After Yeats' death, I find that the tenor of the reviews of the *Plays for Dancers* tends to alter somewhat. The very next production which I can find reviewed is one by the Lyric Theatre Company and performed at the Abbey in 1949. The reviewer, A.J. Leventhal reviewed a production of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* in *The Dublin Magazine*. He concentrated on the production as "a triumph of acting and production" (40). Leventhal focussed exclusively on the acting, stopping only to complain about how the masks inhibited the speech of the actors and to remark on the decision that the dancer "wisely refrained from speaking the lines written for her in the play lest they should spoil the rhythm of her dance. A narrator (Joan Stynes) took this task upon herself and saved the ballerina her breath and made it possible for us to enjoy the dance in its unvocal purity" (40). Clearly here Leventhal is questioning Yeats' decision to give the dancer lines at this point in the play. This may partly reflect the fact that for this 1949 production, the dancer was a ballerina. Yeats, as has been established wrote for a very different form of dance, as practiced by a different dancer, Ito. The comment regarding giving the dancer lines is Leventhal's only complaint against Yeats but it points to a complaint that we will see in other reviews; the playability of Yeats' *Plays for Dancers.* I must question, however, to what degree the fault lies with Yeats and to what degree it lies with the 1949 director who chose such a very different style of dancer. Furthermore, it must be noted that throughout his review, particularly in his critical comments, Leventhal's focus, like Yeats' was on the language. Obviously while he might question some of Yeats' dramaturgical choices such as having the dancer speak, Leventhal agreed with the concept of poetic drama and the importance of the verse itself within the play. Leventhal briefly touches on the almost magical effect of the play on the viewer of which Gogarty, Mitchell and Marsh speak. "Christine Kane danced us into a Yeatsian sidhe mood so that we longed to do what Cuchullain desisted from doing, that is, to follow her into the Country-under-Wave" (40).

From Leventhal's review of an Irish production in 1949, I move on to an American production in 1960. Lewis Funke in *The New York Times* reviewed a production of *Calvary* by a company called The Theatre for the Swan, which according to the program for this production was "[e]ncouraged [...] to believe that 'New York theatregoers have joined their European counterparts in appreciating short plays'" (13). But according to Funke "high hopes and dedication need the buttressing support of exciting play selection. And this has not been the case" (13). Funke's only direct comment on *Calvary* is as "an opaque vignette" (13). All the rest of Funke's comments show his opinion of Yeats' play as being definitely for a specialized audience, referencing Theatre for the Swan possibly "aiming at a strictly coterie following" and that it "appears to be for the buffs, the very special buffs of Off Broadway" due to its play choices (13). Comments such as these show up more and more in reviews of Yeats' plays as time goes on.

The next review I recovered was from a production in Chicago in 1970. Reviewed in the *Educational Theatre Journal,* the Chicago Circle Players at the University of Illinois had produced four plays including *At the Hawk's Well* and *Calvary*. This production also featured *Purgatory* and *A Full Moon in March.* Reviewer David R. Jones states that Yeats' later plays are "deliberately esoteric – a certain obstacle for most directors – and often awkward. At the same time, Yeats demands the use of masks, dance, strange movement, a chorus, song, and the elevated speaking of poetry, elements difficult to master separately, nearly impossible in combination" (90). Frankly, here I differ with Jones. If these elements were "nearly impossible in combination," as he asserts, there would be few Shakespeare plays or absolutely no opera produced on the stage. However, Jones' comments reflect a growing dissatisfaction with Yeats' plays.

Strangely, despite his complaints about Yeats, Jones' complaints about the director are that "If her direction lacked anything, it was more trust in Yeats's own theatrical instincts" (90). Then, Jones goes on to further contradict himself, complaining that Yeats had a "poorly constructed ending"(90) for *At the Hawk's Well* and pointing out his "reputation as a dramatist" as something to be overcome:

> In this dance, in the Guardian's dance in *At the Hawk's Well,* in passages of *Calvary,* these plays rose above competence and brilliance to the kind of moment for which one goes to the theatre in the first place. Considering Yeats's reputation as a dramatist, the talents of the students, and the many difficult arts which Yeats requires us to master, that is a considerable achievement (91).

I found Jones' review confusing and very self-contradictory. The plays aren't all that good, according to him, but the director should trust more in the playwright who wrote them. When he wasn't complaining about the lack of "masks, the marionette-like movements, the songs from the chorus, the musical speech of the principals," Jones was praising the lighting and set for their departure from Yeats "sets and lighting were rather more elaborate than Yeats wished, but perfectly appropriate" (90). This makes no sense. Furthermore he insists that Yeats' reputation and the limited talents of the students were something to overcome but that the production "rose above competence and brilliance." It seems to me that Jones was extremely torn about the quality of Yeats' dramatic work. Again, this turns out to be a more regular feeling among professional theatre critics.

In 1970, the Experimental Theater Club of La Mama produced *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* This production went on to re-appear on the New York stage in at least two other incarnations. Clive Barnes of *The New York Times* started out his review with honest misapprehensions regarding Yeats' playwriting. "Great poets comparatively rarely make even passable playwrights, and I admit the prospect of hearing one of Yeat's (sic) poetic dramas – even though parts of them read so well in a study's solitude – filled me with no great joy" (36). His concerns, however, turned out to be unfounded as he points out. "'The Only Jealousy of Emer' is a beautiful experience, wraithed with Celtic mists, and that sense of epic myth that is poetry's great benison to the theatre" (36). Here, we see that his language has once again begun to sound like that of the earlier viewers of section one in this chapter. Glorying in the mythic beauty of the play, Barnes is able to see that without Yeats' status as a great poet, he could not have produced such an effect. Despite this, Barnes began with great misgivings regarding the play's stageability. Indeed, that status of great poet which so contributed to Barnes' enjoyment was what caused the reviewer to look forward to a Yeats play with "no great joy" as he puts it.

The next review I found, also in *The New York Times,* seems to have the same cast but was produced with another play. Here the reviewer, Walter Kerr appears to have really tuned into some of what Yeats was often trying to achieve with drama. He speaks of Yeats "seeking – in his ritualized pageant plays – to do consciously what Aeschylus had done instinctively, to make a gesture big enough to summon up myth" (5). Although he appeared to understand Yeats' vision more than many reviewers, Kerr frankly had little to say about the production. His review seems barely to approach the detail of those of Marsh, Mitchell, Gogarty or O'Casey.

I assume that the production Kerr saw was remounted two years later, as again there was the same cast and *Emer* was produced with the same play. The reviewer this time, Mel Gussow, points out that Yeats' concept was not followed very loyally as "every word is sung" (26) which was quite antithetical to what Yeats wanted. Gussow's review really reflects the kind of rhapsodizing seen in section one. He refers to the piece in the end as having "beauty [which] is visual, aural, musical, choreographic, poetic and technical – all of it unified" (26). Unlike Kerr, Gussow does not show himself to have a deep understanding of Yeats' dramaturgy but, despite this, Gussow appears to have taken Yeats' drama in on a level that Kerr was unable to access. I believe that comparing the two reviewers in this case is quite relevant as the productions they each saw were most likely similar to the point of possibly being the same.

The next review I uncovered was from a production some time later. In 1998, Michael Scott directed *The Cuchulain Cycle* which included *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* In his review of the production performed at Riverside Studios, Richard Allen Cave details the ways in which Scott "set out consciously with his cast, musicians and technical design team to break wholly with Yeatsian precedent and dictat (sic) relating to traditional modes of staging [...] To put it bluntly, Scott chose to concentrate entirely on the Irish dimension and completely expunge all trace of Japanese influence" (361). When Cave states that Scott set out with his musicians to "break wholly with Yeatsian precedent" he really meant wholly. Cave later goes on to explain it is not Yeats' score, but "Michael Scott's music" and that it was "[s]cored for keyboards, harp, cello, fiddle, percussion, whistle and bass" (362). Cave colors these changes as being for the sake of "implying a narrative continuity that is not actually present within the texts and of making their disparate dramatic styles appear to have an organic coherence" (361). The reason for this is that the plays "were never designed and creatively shaped as a cycle" (361) by Yeats. While Cave enjoyed the *Cycle* as directed and re-visioned by Scott, it all seems to be as a direct result of the great changes Scott has wrought; changing script, music and Yeats' entire vision for the plays. Cave does have a relevant comment, however, regarding this decision. "If Yeats's plays are to stand the test of time, they must render themselves subject to invention, interrogation, deconstruction in the way that Shakespeare, Greek tragedy, Racine, Ibsen have been recreated by changing generations of theatre practitioners" (368).

Finally, Cave concludes that, in addressing Yeats' dramatic questions, "Scott brought us to a vital engagement with the Cuchulain plays as a passionate investigation of theatre as a cultural construct. In doing this, he honoured Yeats as a pioneer for his time, showing the grounds on which we might re-value him as our contemporary" (368). To say nothing of the reviewer's somewhat repetitive writing style, according to Cave, while Yeats may have pioneered some ideas and techniques in the theatre, he needs a bit of an overhaul to be enjoyable to today's audiences.

In 1992, there was an unusual production of *At the Hawk's Well* produced in New Zealand, an operatic version of the play. In his review, Martin Lodge stated that "Nigel Keay's verbatim treatment of Yeats' text is intricate and musically uncompromising" (http://www.nigelkeay.com/opera.htm). Lest one imagine that Keay did not change Yeats' work much, Lodge also refers to the production as "Nigel Keay's *At the Hawk's Well"* (http://www.nigelkeay.com/opera.htm). Indeed, it seems a little irrelevant to mention that this operatic production was "verbatim." I can't think of why choosing to treat the play as a libretto to an opera would mean that lines would need to be cut. While Lodge very much enjoyed the production, calling it "a most impressive achievement, both in concept and execution" (http://www.nigelkeay.com/opera.htm) like Cave it is clear that the non-Yeatsian aspects of the production are what pleased him the most. The original play he deems only “pessimistic” (http://www.nigelkeay.com/opera.htm) while he lavishes compliments on everyone from the soloists to the orchestra to the lighting designers. This production, like Michael Scott's *Cycle,* largely ignored Yeats' rules for producing his plays. It included an orchestra and a choir, neither of which would have pleased Yeats. Furthermore the 'Musicians' were solo singers and played no instruments whatsoever. Also as an opera, it was a lavish and spectacular stage production, as far as possible from Yeats' intimate drawing room audience of “forty or fifty readers of poetry” (Yeats, *Essays,* 221).

In 1995, a New York stage director, Pain McKinnon produced something that reviewer Dan Isaac termed both “modern one-act Noh plays” and “dramas influenced by the Japanese Noh plays” (53). It seems that Isaac was not entirely sure what the concept really was here. One of these plays was Yeats' *Only Jealousy of Emer.* Isaac refers to the Yeats' play as “poetic to a fault” and “maddeningly obscure” (53). Furthermore, he seems to dislike poetic drama inherently as he complains that another of the three productions being performed that evening “is the best bad example of what can happen when a first-rate poet writes a play” (53). Clearly, Yeats' reputation as a dramatist, as Jones discussed in 1970, continues to be an issue for Isaac, 25 years later. Reviewer after reviewer has expressed an almost fearful response to poetic drama, as we see. Even those who actually enjoy the play often suggest a feeling of trepidation when faced with the prospect of a Yeats play, as seen in Barnes' 1970 review. This seems to me to suggest that the reviewers' fears may not be entirely founded upon the truth of

Yeats' dramaturgy.

In 1997, a company known as the Ontological Theatre produced a production which they called *Total Theatre* in which they conflated three Yeats plays: *At the Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *The Death of Cuchulain.* The effect would, one would imagine, be like a miniaturized or abbreviated version of *The Cuchulain Cycle,* as it was missing two plays which are traditionally included. Reviewer John Chatterton, starts out with a complete indictment of Yeats as a playwright:

> Brave the [wo/]man who throws him[her]self into the black hole of presenting Yeats's plays. They require more than an audience of friends that doesn't shuffle its feet or talk. Yeats was a great poet, but he never got the hang of dramatic verse in particular or the dramatic form in general. Perhaps academics will see his dramatic works as experiments in creating a Celtic drama from its mythological roots, parallel with the Greeks' efforts in converting epic to dramatic forms. The Greeks succeeded; Yeats didn't. (www.oobr.com)

And declaring “That out of the way” (www.oobr.com) Chatterton continues. He does not further address his earlier comments in his review. He has declared Yeats an unsuccessful dramatist and that is all there is to say on the subject, according to Chatterton. He seems to enjoy the production all in all, adapted heavily as it was by director Richard Eoin Nash-Siedlecki saying that it "hit and exceeded the mark for subtlety and expressiveness" (www.oobr.com). But then Chatterton complains that "there's more story in there, actually, some of it hard to follow despite copious program notes" (www.oobr.com). Chatterton does not seem to consider that some of his issues with the play might have come from this adaptation, rather than from the original script. Thus, his tendency to criticize Yeats' ability as a playwright is not as relevant to his review. He never mentions the fact that this is an adaptation and that Nash-Siedlecki is at least partly to blame for these issues. Furthermore Chatterton never shows enough knowledge of the difference between adaptation and merely directing a play to give a proper evaluation of how Nash-Siedlecki handled his adaptation. He closes with another damnation of Yeats as a dramatist. "Is it fair to beat Yeats over the head with the Greeks? Perhaps not. But Sophocles could make high tragedy out of a fragment from Cuchulain's tale (killing an unrecognized blood relation). By that measure, Yeats fails" (www.oobr.com). Here Chatterton does not really seem sure of his own yardstick of comparison as he at first questions and then utilizes that same yardstick anyway. Furthermore, I am not sure why it would be unfair to compare Yeats and the Greeks. Indeed, their dramaturgical goals are similar; the Greeks, like Yeats, were looking to stage their own oral legends and convert them from epic form to dramatic. The major difference is that, while Yeats was trying to revive interest in the stories, the Greeks were working from a living tradition. I do not know if Chatterton really knew or much thought about this review but I would say that it is one of the most negative toward Yeats' ability to write plays. I do keep in mind, however, that Chatterton was reviewing a drastically re-worked version of Yeats' plays so this must be remembered when putting Chatterton's comments into their proper context.

In January 2005, a co-op production company in Vancouver produced *At the Hawk's Well* with two other Yeats plays, *The Cat and the Moon* and *Purgatory.* Here the online reviewer, Jerry Wasserman, starts out by explaining that Yeats was looking for an aristocratic and narrow audience. Further, he states that "arcane, anti-populist theatre for coterie audience is, to say the least, a hard sell these days" (http://www.pacifictheatre.org). Like his most recent predecessors, Wasserman seems to enjoy the elements specific to the Vancouver production (and therefore not to Yeats) the most. He states,"[t]he best things about the evening are the interesting musical effects and some striking visual images" (http://www.pacifictheatre.org). When describing a production element which came directly from Yeats's playbook, specifically the folding and unfolding of the cloth, Wasserman calls it "non-rational" (http://www.pacifictheatre.org). In the end, he complains that "unless the kind of stage magic that this production attains only sporadically can be sustained for a whole evening, [the play is] going to remain of interest mostly to academics and theatre historians" (http://www.pacifictheatre.org). Presumably this is a bad thing. Wasserman calls Yeats' theatre "not even remotely concerned with putting bums in seats" (http://www.pacifictheatre.org). This means that it was not meant to be a popular theatre which is clear in everything Yeats writes about these plays. Frankly, most theatre professionals I know consider the "bums in seats" label a most damning one. To Wasserman, however, it appears to be something to which theatrical directors should aspire. Wasserman's comment that the play will be exclusively for "academics and theatre historians" remains a popular complaint among reviewers.

The most recent production review I have located is also an online review from a 2006 production of *Two Yeats Plays* specifically *The Cat and the Moon* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* It seems at first that the reviewer Kimberly Wadsworth is uncomfortable with the idea of reviewing two Yeats plays as she states that "[t]he plays of W.B. Yeats are not easy plays to "get". Yeats was first and foremost a poet [...] and his plays are often highly theatrical work written with a poet's eye" (nytheatre.com). Clearly Wadsworth is trepidatious about this latter fact and does not approach it as a strength of Yeats' plays. I personally disagree with her on this and feel that one of his great strengths as a dramatists was Yeats' tendency to write drama from his place as a poet.

Wadsworth continues her review. "Fortunately, the members of Handcart Ensemble get Yeats, and the company's staging of two of his one-act plays, simply titled *Two Yeats Plays,* serves as a fine introduction to his dramatic vision" (nytheatre.com). Unlike many other reviewers of Yeats' plays, Wadsworth proves herself knowledgeable about him, both quoting his poems and showing her understanding of the changes Yeats made in his version of the original Emer story:

"Yeats took some liberties with the myth, introducing a trickster god", Bricriu (nytheatre.com). Concerned for her fellow audience members, Wadsworth says:

> Those completely unfamiliar with Irish mythology might feel a bit at sea, but this is entirely the playwright's fault – Yeats assumed his audiences knew, or at least should know, more about Celtic mythology than some of them actually did. Fortunately, taking a quick look at Handcart's notes during intermission is more than enough to bring you up to speed. Even if you don't, it's clear enough that Emer, played with grave nobility by Jjana Valentiner, is being pressed into making a heartbreaking choice (nytheatre.com).

Wadsworth is quite correct. Yeats did indeed have high expectations of his audience's knowledge but that again was, at least in this case, due to the exclusivity of his intended audience. Likewise, in hoping to create in his chosen audience an appreciation of Irish mystical lore, Yeats concentrates it strongly in many of his plays. Perhaps the situation is not so much as Wadsworth sees it, a high expectation of the audience but instead an attempt on the playwright's part to impart something to them. However, as Wadsworth complains, it seems that Yeats was not entirely successful in his pedagogical goals at least in this play.

While Wadsworth seems to have largely enjoyed the production, one negative comment brings us back to Yeats' rules. "I did wish for a slightly different [musical] arrangement for the poem that preceded *Emer* – musically it's lovely, but it is sung in a modified round style and I can't quite catch the words" (nytheatre.com). Although the Handcart Ensemble apparently "got" Yeats, they didn't seem to "get" his admonition against exactly this kind of thing.

Wadsworth then goes on to comment on the dancing, "[t]he dance in *Emer* was similarly lovely but seemed to challenge others in the audience slightly (a woman with two young children sat behind me, and during Emer's dance I overheard a whispered 'Mom, what's that lady doing?')" (nytheatre.com). Wadsworth appears to suggest that "challenging" the audience is inherently a negative thing. When I was a small child and my mother took me to see the ballet *Les Sylphides,* I asked why the ladies got "all the rides" (i.e. got picked up). It was no negative reflection on the production that a small child, too young to be part of the intended audience did not understand all the conventions of the ballet. Nor in my opinion was it a negative reflection on Valentiner's dancing or the choreography that a small child in that audience did not necessarily recognize it as dancing. The challenging nature of the dance is, unlike the assumption of knowledge on the part of the audience, not a weakness in the production.

Finally, Wadsworth concludes "Yeats aficionados should definitely consider attending, while those in search of something a little different, and those looking for a bit of a challenge, will also be amply rewarded" (nytheatre.com). In the end, although she was at first wary of a challenge, Wadsworth seems to have found a happy medium in which an audience in search of a challenge will very much enjoy themselves. Yeats' reputation as a dramatist as "hard to get" and "challenging," however, remains, despite the overall good review.

As the reviewers and productions reviewed become more recent, I find that they have tended to become less glowing. Indeed, in some of these reviews it is clear that the reviewers' favourite aspects of some of these performances is the lack of Yeats' artistic vision in the production.

When a director decides to mount a production of a playwright who was particularly prescriptive regarding the performance of his/her work, she must first consider whether or not and to what degree she as director will take this playwright's prescription under advisement. In the case of Samuel Beckett's work, in fact, copyright states that any proposed production concepts must be vetted by the Beckett estate and approved before permission to produce will be approved. I personally have seen a rogue performance of *Waiting for Godot* which disobeyed one of the basic Beckett precepts (the gender of one of the characters) and was very successful. I fully applaud a director's choice to completely rethink and re-create a play in her own image. Furthermore, I believe it is an important part of her job as a director. At the same time, I tend to be a Shakespeare purist, sneering at each change of a line (although I certainly don't mind whether the actors are dressed in Elizabethan garb or outer space suits as long as the directorial choice works theatrically). So to a degree I agree with Cave when he states that Yeats' plays should not be treated more reverently than those of Shakespeare, Greek tragedy or Racine. In the end, Cave states that, in addressing some of the issues that Yeats investigated in his work such as "theatre as a site of opposition between realism and types of stylisation, about the nature and representation of character in drama and the necessary synthesis of the arts of performance (music, speech, movement, design) in an ideal mode of staging", Michael Scott's production "brought us to a vital engagement with the Cuchulain plays as a passionate investigation of theatre as a cultural construct" (368). If this is true, then I applaud Scott's deliberate decision to ignore all of Yeats' rules of production. The only thing that I mourn is the inability of recent play reviewers to appreciate Yeats' vision, as seen particularly in Chatterton.

In considering the ideas of Scott in his review, Cave has unwittingly led to the next chapter of this thesis. Here the opinions and experiences of theatre professionals who have produced some of the *Plays for Dancers* are discussed, particularly with an eye to the continuing issue of the stageability of these plays.

Chapter Six - "It's a Great Night in the Theatre, But is it Yeats?"

Section I – Three Productions of **The Cuchulain Cycle**

As seen in chapter four, the issue of authenticity of Yeats' original concepts for the staging of his plays is an important one for any director who dares to tackle Yeats. It makes a large difference to the way a production is evaluated by audience members and, as we have seen, also by professional reviewers. The importance of loyalty to Yeats' ideas is particularly true for the *Plays for Dancers* as Yeats was specific about how precisely he felt these plays should be performed. Obviously, the increased volume of output on that subject is due to Yeats' attempt to create a new form of theatre through these plays. They were for Yeats a new doorway to his ultimate goal which was to bring something inspiringly and inherently Irish to the stage for the spiritual fulfillment of his intended audience. Indeed, with these plays as we have seen, Yeats' intended audience changed from the more popular audience which other contemporary theatre productions were aiming at to a more aristocratic and exclusive group. This latter group hopefully might appreciate Yeats' work more deeply and completely than the former had. According to the responses I saw to early productions of *At the Hawk's Well,* much of his latter intended audience did appreciate the work created for them some significant amount. Thus, when Yeats was helping to produce *At the Hawk's Well,* his dramaturgical ideas seemed to work well for a stage production of the plays. As we shall see below, however, many directors since Yeats' lifetime have questioned the ability of these precepts to hold up on a modern stage.

Part I - The Cuchulain Cycle *directed by Reg Skene, 1969, University of Winnipeg*

In 1969, at the fledgling University of Winnipeg, director Reg Skene undertook and produced *The Cuchulain Cycle* in a single evening. Speaking of this experience some years later, Skene stated that "[h]aving staged the plays in a single-evening production in 1969, I am convinced that the major patterns of meaning in the plays become apparent only when they are considered together" (x). This opinion of Skene's impacted his book on the subject of Yeats' *Cuchulain Cycle* as well as his production of the play(s) a great deal. Skene addresses Yeats' reputation as a dramatist:

> I have felt at no time any inclination to take a patronising attitude towards Yeats' work in the theatre. All evidence seems to point to the fact that as a practical theatre worker he was innovative, pragmatic and highly skilled. I suspect that the period of greatest respect for Yeats' theatrical ideas and for his accomplishments as a playwright is yet to come. (xi)

These comments of Skene's seem almost those of an apologist for Yeats' drama. It is as though he is looking to justify Yeats to a world which denies his talent or ability when it comes to drama. This shows how much Yeats' reputation as a dramatist suffered. It must be noted, however, that even during his lifetime Yeats was often considered a mediocre or "hard to get" playwright (as Wadsworth called him). I believe that much of the glowing nature of the reactions to his early productions can be seen as Yeats being successful at choosing his intended audience. Skene further states that: "[i]f Yeats were to begin to get the careful and competent professional productions he has generally been denied in our time, it would become increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that he was in actuality a highly successful playwright working in a difficult and not always popular form" (xi). I assume here that when Skene speaks of Yeats as a "successful playwright," he means that Yeats was successful at producing good plays, rather than referring to his having a popular form of success as a playwright. Yeats was never popularly successful as a playwright, only as a poet.

Skene goes on to offer his view of how best to mount a production of the two *noh*-inspired Yeats plays in his *Cycle (At the Hawk's Well* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer).* He states that the signature folding and unfolding of the cloth that Yeats prescribes for the beginning of each play be scrapped "[f]or other than drawing-room presentations" (122). Furthermore, Skene states that these plays should

> be not obtrusively Japanese. Yeats took only the pattern of organisation

> from Japanese *Noh;* the materials are Celtic and it is an ancient Celtic ritual which he is attempting to restore. A study of what Yeats calls 'traditional Irish singing' and an investigation into the experimentation of Florence Farr on the psaltery will be more useful to the producer than a study of the exotic falsetto and discordant music of an actual Japanese *Noh* production. The spirits of Cuchulain and the others must seem to rise from the Irish soil and not be merely oriental imports (122-3).

I will not comment further than to say that Skene had an apparent lack of knowledge regarding *noh* music. The "falsetto" to which he refers is entirely non-existent in *noh.* It is traditional, in fact even when an older man is playing a young maiden, that his naturally low voice be altered in no way. Traditionally, *noh* is full of deep low male voices as I saw when I took a Japanese Theatre course and watched filmed versions of several *noh* productions. I have to assume that Skene is thinking of the singing in Peking Opera in China which often features high-pitched falsetto-type voices for *tan* or female roles. This information also comes from personal experience on my part, having seen two live productions and one filmed of Peking Opera as well.

To return to Skene's comments, when he speaks of Yeats attempting to restore a Celtic ritual, he is referring to the fact that early in his playwriting career, Yeats focussed very much on creating an Irish mystical Order (similar to the Order of the Golden Dawn of which he was a member at one time). Yeats had always planned to create a ritual for this planned Order. Neither the Order nor the ritual ever came about but as Skene says for Yeats the Irish theatre movement was "closely connected, in his mind at any rate, with the spiritual aims which had motivated work on the Irish Mystical Order" (12). Thus, even after the planned ritual drama was scrapped, Yeats still kept its aims as a part of his concept of Irish drama. Skene's understanding of Yeats' theatre and its spiritual goals greatly affected his choices with regard to mounting his production of *The Cuchulain Cycle.* Due to the lack of detail in Skene's description of his production, I have to assume that he is referring to the effect this understanding had on his ideas about the play. It seems, however, curious to me that Skene eschews the use of Yeats' main dramaturgical element of a ritual nature, namely the folding and unfolding of the cloth. Perhaps apart from feeling that this was too 'Japanese' in feel, Skene also believed it would be ineffective and overly abrupt to have such a repetitive action appear in the middle of his *Cycle.* Here is the first of many instances to come in which a director questions and does away with an aspect of Yeats' dramaturgy due to his/her opinion that this element will not work. Of course in Skene's case, and that of the other *Cycle* directors, there is more than one play's aesthetics to be considered. This fact does not, however, mean that the negative opinion of Yeats' ideas is seen less in directors of individual productions of the *Plays for Dancers.*

Skene remarks on some of the staging he chose for his 1969 production of *The Cuchulain Cycle.* "The musicians, druidical figures from some remote age, played sitar, tabla and recorder" (123). I do not see how Skene felt that he would be able to evoke the Irish spirit of the plays utilizing an East Indian traditional instrument with a unique sound like the *sitar* or the *tabla.* This choice of instrument tells me that he felt free to choose them as he saw fit but believed he could still create an Irish spirit for the production. Here, I see a director who made his own choices regarding his play but still attempted to suggest Yeats' ideas within his own artistic vision. I do, however, find that Skene's reasoning for not utilizing the folding cloth make less sense in view of his Indian instrument choices. I am forced to question Skene's logic here.

Part II* - The Cuchulain Cycle, *directed by James Flannery, September 1989, Abbey Theatre

When a director makes a daring decision to part with Yeats' production prescriptions for the *Plays for Dancers,* as some have, an audience member familiar with Yeats' dramaturgical commentaries may well ask – as did Anne Yeats of the 1989 production of *The Cuchulain Cycle* – "is it Yeats?" (Lapisardi, 310).

In his discussion of two versions of *The Cuchulain Cycle,* both of which included *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer,* Frederick Lapisardi asks "[h]ow far can a production go in adapting Yeats's plays to modern theatrical innovations and still remain true to his theories of stagecraft as expressed in his voluminous dramaturgical writings?" (310). As I read through Frederick Lapisardi's consideration of both his own production at the California University of Pennsylvania in 1995 and that of renowned Yeats scholar, James Flannery, at the Abbey Theatre at the First Yeats International Theatre Festival in 1989, I ask myself another question: should a production remain true to Yeats? Or should the director be able to be as innovative and inventive with Yeats' work as if there were no prescriptive instructions remaining behind from the playwright? Despite the fact that Shakespeare left no such instructions, is it not incumbent upon the director to attempt to regenerate or guess at what the playwright's preferences might have been? As a member of the theatre community, I personally say that these rules and prescriptions should not be considered as more than suggestions. I believe that a play is a script for a production, not an end in itself and that a director, designer and/or actor do not owe it to a playwright, living or dead, to follow her original ideas for mounting a production of her play. I agree that the director and dramaturg should remain as true as possible to the playwright's dialogue but I do not feel it is necessary, for instance, to follow the layout and set description to the letter when it is included in the script. Despite this, I feel that Anne Yeats' question remains worth answering as the best way to weigh the quality of a dramatist is to consider the success with which the dramatic ideas of the playwright can be used.

Lapisardi's comments are of particular interest because he is a theatrical creator. As a director of his own vision of Yeats' *Cuchulain Cycle,* and a writer of academic work on Yeats his views are worthy of note. Lapisardi quotes Flannery regarding the issue of authenticity to Yeats. Flannery says "[a]bove all there must be a freedom to experiment, as opposed to taking Yeats's ideas, which in some respects were tentative, as slavish dicta, as some people do" (325). The phrase "slavish dicta" is particularly moving. To become a slave to the deceased playwright is certainly not the goal of any director.

The very act of producing a *Cuchulain Cycle per se* is inherently a rethinking of Yeats' work. Although Yeats often spoke and wrote of his dream of doing a number of plays which would tell the life Cuchulain, he never actually put these plays together. The following are aspects of production which are peculiar to a production style such as the mounting of the *Cycle.* The director must choose the plays to include. This is an issue, as Lapisardi notes that *The Green Helmet* is not always included in a *Cycle* production. The director must consider how to amalgamate the plays, including editing, production order, etc. Furthermore, she must decide how to link such differing pieces together thematically. Such decisions inherently require the director, dramaturg and designer to revisit the plays with the eye of an interpretive artist, rather than with the eye of a scholarly Yeats fan. All these theatre artists must question all of Yeats' ideas in order to produce a cohesive production of the *Cuchulain Cycle.*

Having worked professionally in the capacity of a dramaturg and specifically frequently as a script editor, I have often approached a play from the point of view of performability, the director's needs and vision, length and intended audience. The prospect of even tackling a production of *The Cuchulain Cycle* seems to me a most ambitious one. There are so many plays, written at such different times and, even though they have all been written by the same playwright, they may as well not have been. Yeats had very different ideas regarding theatre and audience at these various times and this fact is reflected in the scripts. Thus, between *On Baile's Strand,* which was written in Yeats' youth, and *The Death of Cuchulain,* which Yeats on his deathbed, the playwright had changed drastically as a poet, a dramatist and as a man. The major changes in his work reveal this clearly. Thus, the three directors of the *Cuchulain Cycle* considered here had a most difficult task to accomplish. To what degree each focussed on authenticity to Yeats is clear.

Lapisardi comments on the extent to which the Flannery incorporated Yeats' ideas for production of his plays while still attempting to "bring Yeats out of the drawing room and on to the popular stage" (321). Of course, this goal is inherently anti-Yeatsian in that Yeats originally wrote the *Plays for Dancers* with a drawing room style playing space in mind. Thus, despite his other uses of Yeats' concepts, Flannery's basic goal was counter to Yeats' plans. In particular Flannery's methodology with regard to the script is considered by Lapisardi:

> he studies the rhythm of the text. He scores the play like a piece of music, and he expects his actors to do the same. Flannery described his method [...] "I work meticulously, line by line, like a singing coach," he said. [..."]I do view Yeats's verse as the equivalent of a musical score and I have little patience with actors who don't respect his innate musical patterns." (314)

The above method reflects Yeats' own experimentation with speaking verse to music which he conducted with Farr. Yeats and Farr worked for years, attempting to find a way to reveal the rhythm and music of verse without interfering with the proper articulation of words through actual singing. Yeats' intentions were manifest throughout his years of work with Farr. A similar priority to Yeats' is clear in Flannery's choices. Like Yeats, Flannery has "little patience" with actors who don't respect "innate musical patterns."

One shouldn't imagine though that this seriousness with regard to Yeats' work means that Flannery has treated the material as sacrosanct. Instead he has ignored many Yeatsian provisos. Not the least of which, as Lapisardi notes, is that "[l]anguage, according to Yeats in essay after essay, must not be drowned out by mechanical devices" (312). However, in Flannery's production: "all night long during the early previews of Flannery's Cuchulain Cycle Yeats's words contended against a barrage of lights, sound effects, props, and semi-erotic, highly athletic movement that exploded at the end into a stunning whole house, rock inspired grand finale" (312). Here Lapisardi's understanding of the production is clearly coloured by his experience as a theatre professional as he includes non-audio interferences such as lights, props and movement in the list of possible distractions from the language. He is clearly familiar with Yeats' dramatic commentary as Yeats frequently included physical movement as one of the distractions from language that he wished to limit. Flannery, however, has chosen to ignore these Yeatsian rules.

Finally, Lapisardi credits Flannery with having "shown anyone who cares to see that these plays are good theatre"(325). Furthermore, he points out that "[w]hat we tried to do with 'The Cuchulain Cycle' at California University of Pennsylvania six years later springs directly out of my reaction to his production which found further enrichment in 1990 and 1991 when I worked with Flannery at the Abbey" (325). Based on these comments, I have to ask myself if Flannery's ability to show people how good theatre Yeats' plays are was based upon the director's tendency to veer away drastically from Yeats' theatrical concepts. Unfortunately never having seen this production, I can only react to it based upon the comments of others. Here I am working entirely from Lapisardi's comments. They lead me toward the conclusion that Flannery's large departures from Yeatsian dramaturgy do not uphold Lapisardi's remark that Yeats is good theatre. Perhaps I might agree that Flannery is good theatre but I do not believe that there was nearly as much Yeats on the stage of the Peacock during the run of this production as there was Flannery. Thus, I must argue with Lapisardi that Flannery has actually shown himself to be able to produce good theatre, rather than Yeats. Flannery's production, therefore, has done little in actuality to improve Yeats' dramatic reputation.

Part III - The Cuchulain Cycle, *directed by Frederick Lapisardi, November 1995, California University of Pennsylvania*

Lapisardi begins by recounting an unusual production that he participated in as a graduate class project years prior to his *Cuchulain Cycle.* In this assignment, the students were expected to do *At the Hawk's Well* in a style which was "as close a reproduction as they could create of Yeats's introduction to his Westernized Noh-type dance plays in Lady Cunard's drawing room" (326). This requirement led to some interesting results.

Lapisardi describes some audience reactions to his final production. His audience overall he calls "respectful and only slightly confused" (326). One particular audience member's reaction deserved special notice. "Our only Japanese guest, Yoshiko Murdick, said we had produced something much akin to what she had experienced of the Noh as a child in Japan: 'Very boring'" (327). Clearly, this was not a wildly successful exercise as a drama piece. It must be noted that with the exception of Murdick, the audience were presumably members of Lapisardi's graduate class in Modern Drama. One would expect a great familiarity from this group with a number of different forms of drama. Despite this, Lapisardi describes them as "confused" by his production. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this reaction but he seems to infer that it is due to the performance's similarity to the original. Clearly, Lapisardi is inferring that the original staging for *At the Hawk's Well* was difficult to comprehend. Marsh, who only saw part of that historic production would disagree with him.

When deciding to do the actual *Cycle,* however, Lapisardi made a surprising choice in choosing his venue. Seemingly unaffected by his experience with *At the Hawk's Well* during his graduate student days, Lapisardi eschewed the University Chapel as it "seemed too like an oversized drawing room for the full cycle. It also presented lighting and acoustical problems" (328). The more practical issues aside, this over-similarity to the original staging of the two *Plays for Dancers* included in the *Cycle* shows Lapisardi's choice to avoid an overly "slavish" (to use Flannery's word) devotion to Yeats' ideas. Again Lapisardi's doubt in Yeats is clear in this decision.

Having decided upon a proscenium stage for his production, Lapisardi who was Chair of the English Department started to have issues with the Chair of Theatre. Specifically, the Theatre Chair Richard Helldobler

> did not accept Yeats's "literary theatre" as performance art. [Helldobler's] background was in musical theatre and dance. Written texts, especially in poetry, have never been his forte. But when I loaned him my tape of Bill

> Whelan's music from Flannery's Cuchulain Cycle, he began to see possibilities for movement and vivid stage pictures. Ultimately, he agreed to work on the project mostly out of a sense of obligation to the University rather than any change of heart about Yeats or the place of poetic drama in the modern theatre. (328-9)

Here, the reaction of a theatre professional who is grounded in physical movement is seen. When the Theatre Chair shows trepidation regarding the performability of Yeats' "literary theatre," he is one of many people who question this aspect of Yeats' dramaturgy. Much like many others of his professional group, Helldobler found himself quite uncomfortable with the concept of staging these plays and finally only did so "out of a sense of obligation to the University," One wonders where Lapisardi stood on the question of the literary aspects of Yeats' theatre. Already, Lapisardi has clearly had a dubious stance on the produceability of Yeats.

Lapisardi was a long way from the Abbey Theatre and Dublin with his production which put him a long way from Yeats' intended audience. Lapisardi was on a different continent with an intended audience who were coming from a completely different cultural background. Thus, it was important to keep this in mind as he planned out his production.

> [B]efore we ever selected a cast or put a single scene on the rehearsal

> floor, I used semiotics to determine those codes and signs which would allow me to develop a performance text most in keeping with Yeats's dramatic intentions that could work as effectively before an American audience as James Flannery's had with an Irish one. (330)

As he was considering how to accomplish this, Lapisardi had to examine his intended audience carefully. One of the observations he made was that "American audiences do not necessarily need to fully understand what a play is about as long as they find it entertaining" (335). Further he points out that:

> If the director knows, understands the text, and builds in proper signs to move the viewer in the right direction, those with deeper knowledge of the material will find satisfaction in the presentation. Those who don't possess the same level of understanding will still ride the surface, as a body surfer, carried by the thrust of a wave, moves inevitably toward the shore. Knowledgeable theatre critics who bring deeper appreciation of the codes and action and enigmas built into a play often help move audiences in the right direction. (335)

Here, the importance of the theatre critic to the director is clear. Lapisardi is in fact looking to "knowledgeable" critics (i.e. those who understand Yeats) to unpack some of the dramaturgical modes of expression to his intended audience. Apparently what he really wanted was an equivalent of Kimberly Wadsworth to see and review his production. It is surprising to see Lapisardi mention making decisions "in keeping with Yeats' dramatic intentions" as to date he has shown only doubt regarding Yeats' ability to make good dramatic choices.

Next, Lapisardi speaks of making "careful adjustments to adapt the Cuchulain Cycle to American culture codes" (337). His reasoning for this is the fact that most Americans, even those of Irish descent do not know the Cuchulain stories the way that Flannery's intended Irish audience did. In the case of Flannery's audience, Yeats and others like him had already successfully re-introduced these legends to the existing Irish cultural milieu. Lapisardi's audience has not benefitted from these Celtic restorationists in quite the same way. Thus Lapisardi must make some very different choices than Flannery did for his American audience.

The first thing that Lapisardi does away with is Irish accents, reasoning that "the cadences all arise out of the text" (337). Thus the original accents were not necessary to his production. Again he may also have felt that early 20th century Irish accents would not only be difficult for American actors to master authentically but would also alienate American audiences. Accents remain an important part of Lapisardi's production. However, as Lapisardi notes, "[w]e did attempt to curb western Pennsylvanian, West Virginian and New York dialects among the principal characters, though sometimes we exaggerated their use among the rustic figures" (337). This choice is particularly important. Language was an essential issue for Yeats, as a poet and a poetic dramatist. Utilizing accents as he chose to, Lapisardi was attempting to give his intended American audience a verbal sign of class and station. Giving Yeats' "rustic figures" more exaggerated accents marked these characters as being simpler and possibly more comic. Here, Lapisardi has incorporated an American signifier for the lower class and less educated; namely the accent, into this uniquely Irish drama. Class is not as easily recognized or as stratified in America as it is in the British Isles, including Ireland. Thus, Lapisardi needed to find a clear sign of a character's class.

Lapisardi speaks of taking "some liberty with Yeats's stage directions, though we changed none of the dialogue" (343). Obviously the language and poetry were more important to Lapisardi than the stage directions as seen above in his continuing reticence to use Yeats' ideas. He says that Flannery's decision to cut sections of the plays are due to the fact that "[h]e neither trusted nor understood Yeats" (342). Lapisardi made these decisions to depart from the stage directions for a few reasons. One was to help create a through-line of action for all the five plays in the *Cycle*. Another was for the sake of the intended audience. A third is that he changed from Yeats' original music to incorporate something "more clearly contemporary American" *(*344*)*. Lapisardi defended his changes: "[m]y use of semiotics never supersedes my attention to Yeats's theories [...] I may bend a stage direction or two here or there, but Yeats's text and his dramaturgical theories remain my guiding principles" (345). I do not see a lot of evidence in Lapisardi's other comments, however, that this is the case with his production. Finally, I will apply Anne Yeats' important question to all of the above productions as they have been expressed by Lapisardi and Skene himself.

Part IV – Is It Yeats?

So, with all these varying approaches to directing *The Cuchulain Cycle,* the Anne Yeats' question stands "Is it Yeats?" In the case of Skene's 1969 production there is little information. Skene's comments, while reflective of his experience directing the *Cycle,* rarely address his production decisions and issues. Skene comes from the position that Yeats originally wanted to create ritual drama for an Irish mystical Order. From this position, Skene incorporates various mystical and magical ideas about which Yeats wrote, spoke and in which the poet devoutly believed. Skene applies these ideas to the *Cycle* plays throughout his book, backing it all up with quotations directly from the plays. I certainly cannot argue with Skene's interpretation of the Cuchulain plays. In his analyses of the different plays, Skene rarely discusses Yeats' prescriptions for the *mise-en-scene,* except in his discussion of to what degree a director should incorporate the Japanese elements of the two *Plays for Dancers.*

Unlike Lapisardi he doesn't address the issue of the *Plays* as drawing room theatre in particular. I see, in his scant discussion of his production, that Skene mentions only two major changes to Yeats' suggestions; specifically skipping the folding of the cloth in a non-drawing room production (which one assumes he produced) and applying a new, different soundtrack which was written for his production. In this last, all the directors seem to agree although in Skene's case there is no discussion regarding this decision. Despite these two rather small changes to Yeats' descriptions, Skene seems to have incorporated much of Yeats' vision in his production. "[T]he cycle was played on a unit set of stone-like shapes [...] Costuming was simple and limited to a few primary colours and careful attention was given to lighting control, particularly in scenes involving the supernatural" (123). Here, one sees some of Yeats' wishes played out including the simple set and costuming, neither of which presumably would distract the audience from the players in the subdued lighting. Clearly, in the Skene production the supernatural had to be achieved through language and acting alone and not through exciting lighting effects. This is just as Yeats would have wanted it. In his description of the costumes, however, Skene does not mention masks which makes me wonder if he incorporated them at all.

As seen above, Skene seems to have been quite true to Yeats' rules for production. Not only that, but in his consideration of the plays and what they mean, Skene incorporated another aspect of Yeats' life; the mystical. This aspect was of great importance to Yeats. In reading his wife George's descriptions of daily life, I found constant mentions of her automatic writing, swamis and séances. They were a regular part of her and her husband's life together and Yeats was so delighted by George's automatic writing and the results thereof that he had it published. To bring this mystical aspect of Yeats into a consideration and production of his plays is in my opinion to include something so uniquely Yeatsian that I cannot answer Anne Yeats' question any other way but "yes" in the case of Skene.

For Flannery there are more issues. Lapisardi points out that Flannery wanted "to bring Yeats out of the drawing room and on to the popular stage" (321). Frankly, I believe that this choice was a large part of Anne Yeats' reason for asking her question. It must be noted, however, that Yeats himself did not treat *The Plays for Dancers* exclusively as drawing room productions. *The Dreaming of the Bones,* while it opens at least potentially with the folding and unfolding of the cloth as in *At the Hawk's Well,* was originally produced at the Abbey Theatre on their main stage with Yeats' permission. Not only was the first production done on a stage, rather than a drawing room but Yeats adapted a prose version of another dance drama, *The Only Jealousy of Emer* with the title *Fighting the Waves* for the Abbey stage and for the dancer Ninette de Valois. "In 1927 the Abbey School of Ballet was set up under the auspices of Ninette de Valois and two years later *Fighting the Waves* resulted from the collaboration of Yeats and the dancer" (Ellis, 328). Thus if Yeats could allow one of his dance plays to have its original production on a regular stage and then adapt another for the Abbey stage, complaints that Flannery brought this very same play back to the Abbey are somewhat unfounded.

This is not by any stretch of the imagination Lapisardi's only concern with Flannery's direction, however. Flannery, of the three discussed *Cycle* directors above, is the only one who freely edited Yeats' verse. As we see in the discussion of Flannery's process with the script, the rhythm of Yeats' text was essential to him, but obviously far from sacrosanct. He was quite open to removing large sections of text, so much so that Lapisardi questioned his trust and understanding of the playwright.

Here again I will speak as a dramaturg. I have worked more than once on productions of Shakespeare plays. Despite Shakespeare's place as the great 'Bard' and his widely accepted status as the greatest playwright in the English language, his work is routinely edited for production. Indeed one of the reasons that Kenneth Branaugh's film version of *Hamlet* is so famous is because it did not remove even one line from the widely accepted 'correct' quarto edition. Branaugh's was the first, and thus far the last, time I have seen a completely unedited version of this play. If it is acceptable and even considered necessary to edit Shakespeare, it must be acceptable to do the same with Yeats, a much less widely regarded poetic playwright. Even when little additions or changes are done to Shakespeare's script (such as adding the inevitable Canadian expression “eh” to a production titled *Taming of the Shrew '82* that I saw at the Manitoba Theatre Centre) no one asks “Is it Shakespeare”?

Although I do not know the full extent to which Flannery edited Yeats' scripts or how this affected the production, I do not feel that merely choosing to edit the script inherently takes Flannery's production out of the realm of the 'acceptable.' More of an issue to both theatre reviewer Cave and Lapisardi is the finale that Flannery added to his version. Again I have not experienced this production but the music composer's description of this sequence as "reminiscent of *Hair* or similar musicals" (in Lapisardi, 313) gives me pause. I have to agree with Lapisardi's complaints and concerns that Yeats' words had to contend against many distractions. Since Yeats was so adamant about not having the language fight with distractions of any kind, I am forced to side with Anne Yeats in her question. Can one call it Yeats when this one central dictum was so completely ignored? Furthermore what was the point of all Flannery's work with the language if it was so easy for an audience member to have his/her attention taken away from it by another aspect of the performance?

Now I come to Lapisardi's account of his own production from 1995. Like Skene's, this was a university production. First, Lapisardi eschewed the use of a theatre space because it was too much like the drawing room prescribed by Yeats for the dance plays. However, as seen above, Yeats did not insist exclusively on such a playing space for these plays.

Lapisardi utilized semiotics to make the existing script (which he carefully left untouched with regard to language) palatable to an American audience. He incorporated local accent, for example, as a way to signal important aspects of a character to the audience . He "took some liberty with Yeats's stage directions" (343) as he felt that the dialogue was more important than the stage directions. Here again as a theatre worker, I agree with him. It is not uncommon, particularly in the work of Henrik Ibsen or Lillian Hellman, to find the set described in great detail in the stage directions. Never have I seen a director set the scene exactly as it is described in the script. In my opinion, these are probably often descriptions of the original sets for the plays and with the exception of essential pieces, it is the director's prerogative to set the scene as she sees fit. I believe that it is an extremely important part of the production process to allow a director to re-vision a play in her own way.

So are they Yeats? In so far as any production which was not personally directed by Yeats can be I suppose some of these were. So when Lapisardi obediently copied as much of the original production of *At the Hawk's Well* as he could in his graduate Modern Drama class, was it Yeats? In other words, was even that original production, or the version produced in Yeats' own drawing room at Merrion Square or the one produced at Renvyle (which Yeats apparently enjoyed) properly Yeats? What precisely did Yeats have to do with these productions? While it is clear from Yeats' description that he had some input into the first production in Lady Cunard's drawing room, it is unclear that he had any input into any other. In fact for the Renvyle production, Yeats was abroad for months before it was performed which presumably would be the time that it was being rehearsed. So with the exception of the original masks designed for the first production and approved by Yeats it may not have been very 'Yeats.' It is clear that Yeats did not complain about his prose/dance version of *Only Jealousy of Emer,* titled *Fighting the Waves.* My point is that there is no such thing as a purely Yeatsian performance of any of his plays, nor was there necessarily one even during his lifetime. The question "is it Yeats?" is inevitably only answerable by the deceased poet himself. Thus, I argue that the point is largely moot.

What is relevant is the question of how the changes in Yeats' concepts made by these directors affects Yeats' status as a dramatist. Does Lapisardi's tendency to avoid many of Yeats' theatrical opinions reflect poorly upon Yeats' ability to create decent plays? Since all these directors chose to do Yeats plays, one must start from the position of assuming that they had at least some respect for his plays. Furthermore, they chose to tackle not one of the *Plays for Dancers* but two in their versions of the *Cuchulain Cycle.* For Skene the *Cycle* seems to have become almost an obsession, as years after his production, he was still working on a book about it. Both Lapisardi and Flannery have also published on Yeats as a dramatist. So clearly these three men have in common a deep interest in Yeats' drama. I am forced to wonder, however, based upon their choices as directors whether they really respected his theatrical ideas. Perhaps even these Yeats *aficionados* see Yeats as inherently somewhat difficult to stage.

Section II - Directing **The Dreaming of the Bones**

"Yeats's text and his dramaturgical theories remain my guiding principles" (345). This statement of Lapisardi's is a far cry from Michael Scott's remarks. Like Scott, however, Lapisardi does question the wisdom of a slavish devotion to Yeats' dramaturgical concepts by placing them in their milieu specifically on the level of the personal for the poet himself:

> the first problem to face Flannery or any director who would put on *The Dreaming of the Bones.* Knowing they represent a limited period of disillusionment, should I follow the playwright's written instructions found in the Introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan,* the notes to the plays, and the Preface to *Four Plays for Dancers* and thereby restrict the size and makeup of my audience to a chosen few, or should I consider this play in light of Yeats's attraction to the public stage both before and after these theories were formulated, and take my chances with this and the other Plays for Dancers on a traditional stage before whatever, if any, theatre-goer who will pay the price of admission? (167)

I find this a particularly incisive way of considering this issue. Too often when critics complain about how closely Yeats' rules were not followed (see Chatterton above) they are not paying attention to the circumstances under which Yeats wrote his recommendations for staging. Lapisardi puts the comments into their proper material context within Yeats' life. The disillusionment he felt with the audiences who attended the Abbey and his inability to form them into something else was very much a part of what Yeats was undergoing when he wrote about the *Plays for Dancers* and when he wrote the actual plays themselves.

As I established earlier, Yeats during his lifetime made no obvious significant effort to ensure that his own stricture regarding audience was followed to the letter, particularly in the staging of *The Dreaming of the Bones*. Lapisardi also notes that "Yeats's guiding principles [...] provided an unusually limited set of standards to go by" (168). Thus for Lapisardi the issue is that the "difficult choice comes with the decision to go with these works as drawing room pieces or stage plays, as intimate theatre of the intellectual or show-biz. Eventually, even Yeats faced the same problem" (168-69).

I'm not sure personally that I agree with Lapisardi's dichotomy of "theatre of the intellectual" versus "show-biz". I believe that many stage plays could fall into the first category quite nicely. It is not necessary to have a musical finale directly out of *Hair* simply because a director has chosen to mount his/her production in a proscenium theatre space.

Like *The Only Jealousy of Emer, The Dreaming of the Bones* was also originally performed on a stage, the Abbey in this case (1931). While *Emer* was originally staged without Yeats' permission in Amsterdam, this was not true with *Dreaming*. Yeats' decision to allow a stage performance of the latter play leaves Lapisardi with the feeling that "the option seems to be there for either drawing room or stage" (169). Clearly Lapisardi believed that this option existed or he would not have staged two other *Plays for Dancers* as he did in his *Cuchulain Cycle.*

In comparing productions of *The Dreaming of the Bones,* Lapisardi uses various different stagings. I will address two of them here. The first chronologically of these was one directed by Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray in 1986.

Part I - **The Dreaming of the Bones** *and* **Nishikigi** *directed by Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, 1986, University College, Dublin*

Christopher Murray is described by Masaru Sekine in the Preface to his book on this production as "an Irish academic, Dr. Christopher Murray" while Sekine described himself as "a Noh actor" (ix). It is clear from the rest of the Preface, however, that this is merely one of Sekine's qualifications. In his thank-yous, Sekine credits the Japan Foundation for funding a Visiting Professorship of Japanese Culture at University College, Dublin. Thus, it would follow that Sekine, as the recipient of this position would also possess the necessary degrees to fulfill it. The artistic collaboration which resulted from what Sekine calls "this international enterprise" (x) was considered significant enough that Sekine felt it merited a book on the subject.

Augustine Martin raises basic questions in discussing the genesis of the project:

> what would it be like if an English translation of a Noh play, for instance *Nishikigi,* were performed under the auspices of a professional Noh director: and what would be the effect of the same Noh director producing on the same night its Yeatsian equivalent, *The Dreaming of the Bones,* according to the Noh convention? (xv)

The answer, says Martin is that "[t]he experiment has proved so stimulating, not least in retrospect and 'excited reverie', that it made the present book a virtual necessity" (xv-xvi).

Lapisardi notes that "[a]s with most theatrical productions, except for this book, little else remains by which the UCD experiment may be judged" (171). Thus, we must look to the reminiscences of those involved for any details on how the plays were performed and how this "experiment" developed. Martin discusses the masks and pine "branch" used in the production of *Nishikigi* in the Introduction to the book. "[T]he Noh masks which Sekine fashioned from wire, paper and paint – I have them on the wall of my office – the symbolic pine branch made of wire and cloth" (xvi). Here without knowing it, Martin has revealed some significant information about this production of the *noh* play. Specifically, he has revealed here that Sekine did not direct a strictly traditional *noh* production.

In my Japanese Theatre course, as previously mentioned I saw a number of filmed *noh* plays. Here I learned a great deal about the conventions of *noh*. As Martin has revealed, in the Sekine/Murray production the masks are far simpler than those used by professional *noh* actors. The professional masks are made by specialist artists and sometimes are kept and used literally for centuries by a particular *noh* troupe. This fact reveals that the maker of the *noh* mask would use more sturdy materials than paper. I have seen photographs also of *noh* masks whose age is listed and this longevity of the items is not unusual. Likewise, these photographs are not of museum pieces but instead of masks which are regularly used by the *noh* troupe which owns it.

Furthermore, the pine tree (rather than a mere branch) would be properly painted on the backdrop, not made of fabric and wire. Again, in a *noh* play, the pine tree would be rendered by an artist of appropriate skill. As previously quoted from the Fenollosa/Pound volume, Fenollosa points out that "[t]o paint these trees well is a great secret of Kano artists." (59) I cannot speak to Sekine's skill as a visual artist but it is clear that making the masks and backdrops for *noh* is not a skill that he used to recreate accurately for this production.

Martin's description of the stage backs up the theory that the *noh* production was not a typical one. "It was decided to stage them in the seminar room, with flat lighting, a white sheet for background, a tiny humped tent to represent a mountain and a cave" (xvi). Obviously then a proper *noh* stage was not utilized either, nor was it dressed traditionally as the tent would not typically be included in a *noh* play. As we saw with *Takahime,* the director chose a skeletal mountain set piece with fabric over it, as I saw in the accompanying photos of the production. Sets are non-existent in *noh* and productions normally feature only the most minimal and representational of props.

Martin goes on to state that "Dr. Christopher Murray – [...] was cast in the role of *waki* in *Nishikigi"* (xvi). Murray is referred to as "an Irish academic" in the Preface and nowhere is he called a *noh* actor. Therefore I am forced to assume that he has never undergone the years of training usually required to fulfill even such a secondary position as *waki.*

In this book, one of the actors, Colleen Hanrahan discusses what it was like to act in these two plays. "Our performance first of *Nishikigi* provided us with an experiential base to try to recreate the authentic acting skills Yeats might have desired for *The Dreaming of the Bones" (*128). As is the case with many of Hanrahan's comments, I find this one interesting. If Yeats did desire a particular experiential base for the actors in *Dreaming,* he neither wrote about it nor did he have the experiential base himself from which to imagine it. That is, he knew very little if anything about actual *noh* acting, neither what it feels like to perform nor what it should look like on the stage.

Hanrahan goes on to specific aspects of the production, starting with masks:

> Although we used masks with great effect in *Nishikigi* for the ghost lovers, we did not use masks for Diarmuid and Dervorgilla in *The Dreaming of the Bones.* Even though Yeats noted that his shades were to be masked, I believe that we did not diverge from the original interpretation because masks are only a representation of the supreme reality encompassed in the actor's role (128-29).

Although Hanrahan goes on to quote from Yeats in order to back up her thesis that this production did not diverge from Yeats' "original interpretation," I can't argue with Yeats' clear and direct note in the Persons of the Play. "A STRANGER (*wearing a mask).*/ A YOUNG GIRL (*wearing a mask)" (Controversies,* 380). It is one thing in my opinion to question whether or not the director should follow all the playwright's instructions but it is quite another to ask whether or not the playwright really meant what he said. Obviously there is no doubt that it was Yeats' original intention to have these characters in masks. The two directors of these plays decided not to follow this intention.

In other cases in the production, the directors seemed to turn to *noh* devices for inspiration with the Yeats play according to Hanrahan:

> Yeats was impressed as early as 1902 with the notion of the power of the

> mind to evoke even more powerful images on stage in these statuesquely held poses. We tried to recreate this concept and soften it by using the delicately flowing rhythms of the Noh. For instance, as Dervorgilla I moved quite slowly and for the first half of the play held an entranced pose while I watched the other two characters engaged in dialogue. This restrained repose may have made the audience tune in more effectively when I suddenly came to life to begin my speech. I found that this energy-retention technique certainly drew our already close audience further towards us. The boundaries between audience and actor seemed to dissolve (131-2).

Here I agree with Hanrahan that this experiential base did provide something that Yeats was trying to achieve with his drawing room theatre; a closer relationship between the actor and the audience member.

In the case of the *noh michiyuki* or travel song, Hanrahan again backs up the directors' choice to lean more toward a *noh* convention to achieve a Yeatsian effect:

> Though Yeats's specific acting directions are for the actors to 'go around the stage once' at the beginning of each of the three divisions of the journey, our actors remained like statues, distantly removed [...] Assuming the Noh convention of *michiyuki* for the travel song seemed more

> appropriate than physical action to initiate Yeats's goal of bringing the audience to a state of reverie. (133)

Clearly, the goal is to achieve the effect Yeats was looking for, but the directors, through Sekine's superior understanding and personal experience of *noh,* felt that their method would work better than Yeats' original concept.

Murray and Sekine, perhaps due to some ignorance regarding the actual circumstances of the original production of *Dreaming of the Bones,* or perhaps for their own reasons, chose to use the "original score of music composed in 1917 by Walter Morse Rummel" (134). But, as Lapisardi points out in his chapter on productions of *Dreaming of the Bones,* for the original production Yeats chose "to abandon the Rummel music as too difficult" (as quoted in Lapisardi, 175). In her discussion, Hanrahan continues her examination of Yeats' work with the assumption that Rummel's was "The music Yeats chose to accompany and to express his play" (135). Perhaps she was unaware of that last minute change of music.

Lapisardi's conclusion regarding the Murray/Sekine production is rather damning:

> They didn't trust the text as theatre, they overplayed Yeats's ignorance of traditional Noh, and they assumed that he was merely attempting to

> duplicate the Noh, so they consistently applied either Noh theories or their own concepts of what the playwright should have done rather than running *Nishikigi* as Noh and *The Dreaming of the Bones* as Yeats (183).

I am not prepared to be quite as hard on the directors as Lapisardi. I find often that the directors appear to take liberties with Yeats and replace his ideas with *noh*-inspired techniques, but, when they do, it seems their hearts are in the right place. Usually they are hoping to achieve Yeats' goals by employing a *noh*-like approach.

When they do choose to follow Yeats' expressed wishes, in the musical score, the directors are ironically wrong. Here what appears to be an attempt to be true to the original production is incorrect. Where I really question the directors is in their actual production of a *noh* play. I have already mentioned several issues with *Nishikigi's* performance and there are more still. Obviously, most of the roles in *Nishikigi* were done by Irish actors with comparatively scant training. Martin states that:

> There was no hope that the director could, in the couple of months available to him, train his players in the intricate mysteries of Noh performance. But I have seldom seen a troupe of actors work so hard, or strive so bravely to apprehend the inner strangeness of so unfamiliar a form (xvi).

Furthermore, the play was performed in translation with apparently only one exception as Martin observed "Masaru Sekine's powerful rendering of the Noh chant in Japanese in the intervals of speech and movement was mysteriously touching" (xvii). What *noh* chant Martin is speaking of here is unclear as most of *noh* theatre is chanted. Was Sekine acting as the lead musician, chanting out cues for the rhythm of the actors and the other musicians, or was he acting as *shite,* the lead *noh* actor chanting out his lines?

This leads me to the question of the musicians in *noh.* As with Yeats' *Plays for Dancers, noh* is properly accompanied by a group of musicians who likewise act as a dramatic chorus. This aspect of *Nishikigi* is nowhere discussed by Martin (who seems to have addressed the particulars of the production in the most detail) or by Hanrahan as she examines "the major Noh features as they were experienced in the play" (128). This fact brings me to the conclusion that the traditional *noh* music was excluded. The music is the aspect of *noh* which sets the rhythm of the chanting and tells the actor when to bring his energy up and when to hold it in. Music is essential to the performance of *noh.*

Perhaps it may seem a bit picky and maybe even overly demanding to ask a troupe of Irish university actors to be able to stage a proper *noh* play with mere months of preparation and a complete lack of cultural support. I agree that is too much to ask. It seems to me as I read Hanrahan's experiential account of the production, however, that the Irish participants may have felt that they knew and understood *noh* better than they could have, based upon their involvement in *Nishikigi.* In particular, I go back to the glaring omission in Hanrahan's "major Noh features" of music. In considering music she only compares Rummel's score to Yeats' intentions for *Dreaming of the Bones* how this all worked in production, as if *Nishikigi* had no musical score. This is entirely at odds with the truth about *noh.*

I feel that by simplifying *noh* for this group of western theatre artists, Sekine did not leave them with an appropriate understanding of the Japanese traditional form. I question whether performing *Nishikigi* helped them better understand *noh* or whether it led them into a false sense of security regarding their ability to comprehend the complexities of *noh.* Clearly as a *noh* actor, Sekine would have some knowledge to impart, but I assume that as a full-time professor he would not be a professional *noh* actor. Sekine did have some professional training in noh, coming from an acting family. The exact nature and extent of this training Sekine does not detail.

Part II **- Dreaming of the Bones, Cathleen ni Houlihan *and* Purgatory *directed by James W. Flannery, 1990, Peacock Theatre***

Lapisardi notes the most important and obvious difference between Flannery's triple bill production and the double bill produotion that Murray/Sekine created. "The Sekine and Murray experiment contrasted and compared Yeats's piece with the Noh; at the Abbey, Flannery held Yeats up to Yeats" (184). Lapisardi further notes that Flannery again, as he did with his *Cuchulain Cycle* the year before, "spared no small expense" with his "grand opening which included not only the press, but dignitaries ranging all the way up to the President of Ireland" (184). Also while Murray and Sekine followed Yeats' prescription for simple lighting in their production:

> Flannery had lighting designer Trevor Dawson plot intricate patterns on the Peacock's computerized control board.
>
> What's more, Flannery's handling of that lighting created a problem of interpretation for the actors playing the Young Man and the two spectres. At the point where Dervorgilla blows out the lantern [...] the audience must be led to understand that the events take place in the dark of the night. If the light comes from "ceiling lights" as Sekine and Murray describe modern Noh performances [...] the sense of this scene must come to the audience through the spoken word. They must suppose the darkness. But under theatre lights, the imagination grows lazy because it presumes the setting to be created by stagecraft, and any variation from the expected must be established through emphasis on other signs. When the Young Man says the wind has blown his candle out, the normal expectation demands that the stage grow dark. But Flannery played this scene in cold, even light which grew somewhat brighter when it might be

expected to get dark (185).

This in fact is exactly the issue I had with Kenneth Branaugh's film version of *Henry V*. As the Battle of Agincourt is being verbally portrayed by one of my favourite actors (Derek Jacobi) as the Narrator, I see it portrayed in living gory colour. I asked myself why was it being described then if I could watch it. Where Shakespeare had written for a stage that would be unable to support a decent portrayal of a battle, Branaugh faced no such limitations in his film version and went all out in portraying this scene. The problem for me is that he made the Narrator utterly unnecessary. Conversely, in the case of Flannery's version of *Dreaming,* he made all the dialogue regarding the darkness confusing and meaningless by not portraying the lack of light when he could have. If it is clearly possible to achieve a certain effect, an audience will not understand why it is not done. It leads to confusion when an obviously complicated lighting layout does not allow for a textual necessity. Lapisardi points out that Flannery chose to interpret the entirety of the action of the play as a dream of the Young Man character. This may explain Flannery's lighting choices, but it seems that the ploy was unsuccessful as "not a single reviewer picked up on Flannery's point that it all took place in the Young Man's mind" (187).

While the Sekine/Murray production had a Yeatsian "invited audience of about thirty" (Martin in Sekine & Murray, xvi) for each of its two performances, Lapisardi remarks that Flannery's version "drew over two thousand" (188).

However he also adds that the new Peacock Theatre "holds but 106 people to its predecessor's 102. If Yeats allowed *The Dreaming of the Bones* to be played at the Abbey in 1931, he certainly couldn't object to Flannery's choice of the Peacock for 1990" (188).

Flannery's decision not to use masks also comes under Lapisardi's microscope, but one of the reasons for this is clear when the other plays on the bill are considered.

> Neither Olwen Fouere who played Dervorgilla nor David Heap who was Diarmuid has "commonplace" features, which well may be why Flannery chose them for those roles, but he had a stronger reason for leaving both unmasked. Fouere had already appeared as Cathleen in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and would return as the spectral mother in *Purgatory.* She was central to his theme of transformation. He could have masked her for all three roles, but why waste such a striking face? (189)

While the fact that he wanted to emphasize his triple casting of Fouere was important to Flannery, this does actually argue against the Sekine/Murray decision to leave the two characters unmasked in the Yeats play. After all, if they are masked in one play oughtn't they to be in the other? In the Sekine/Murray production masking would have helped emphasize the multiple casting while in the Flannery one it would have obfuscated it.

Music in *Dreaming of the Bones* was another departure from Yeats' preferences. Once again, as he had in *The Cuchulain Cycle,* Flannery had Bill Whelan compose his music for him. Whelan seemed pleased with the result:

> For the most part, songs were only required for *Dreaming of the Bones.* Again, the music for this production was all pre-recorded. However, on this occasion it worked more to our advantage; having a full range of studio facilities allowed me to try to create some rather ethereal sound to complement Sarah-Jane Scaife's slow motion, otherworldly movement patterns (in Lapisardi, 191).

Here, not only the decision to use Whelan at all but to use pre-recorded music was a huge departure from Yeats' preferences. Furthermore Flannery replaced the musicians with "singer-dancers who neither carried nor played instruments" (190). Again, this was also the case in Flannery's *Cuchulain Cycle.* Perhaps Whelan was correct that his "ethereal sound" matched the "otherworldly movement patterns" but was it Yeats?

Lapisardi addresses this when he considers the words of Scaife and Whelan, as they worked with Flannery again and again on Yeats:

> Except for Flannery, none of the key architects of the Yeats Festival had

> substantial academic credentials; they were theatre professionals whose classroom had been primarily public performance. Yet one after another they spoke of the importance of Yeats's words to what they attempted on the Peacock stage (191).

This fact bodes well for both the Flannery production and Flannery's unyielding attention to Yeats' verse in these plays. However, it must be remembered that even a fairly uneducated individual will be able to identify Yeats as a famous poet, particularly if that person is Irish. It is not much of a stretch to assume that the words of a poet are important.

Lapisardi further quotes Whelan on his decision to use Yeats (not *noh* as did Sekine and Murray) as the basis of his music:

> From my earliest acquaintance with Yeats's plays, I was struck with their musicality. It is astonishing when one learns that Yeats supposedly had no musical ear, and could not distinguish one tune from another. However, his verbal music is undeniable, and the internal rhythms of his lyrics are always perfect. My melodies for the songs were always dictated by the natural flow of his lyrics (192).

It must be admitted that Whelan clearly had a sense of Yeats' rhythmical verse. The issues of whether or not a production is really Yeats are many and varied as will be seen below.

Part III - But Is It Yeats?

In considering these different versions of *The Dreaming of the Bones,* Lapisardi allows one to think about the questions these theatre workers have asked regarding Yeats' work and how they should or can be answered. In the case of the Sekine/Murray production, Martin asks the relevant questions and gives what answer they found during the course of their "experiment":

> What our performances yielded was something between the closed circuit of the Japanese Noh and the more democratic and profane experience of contemporary theatre; something nearer the rarefied atmosphere of the Cunard drawing-room than the normal theatre feeling created by professional renderings of the dance plays. In the latter case the use of stage lighting and the routine audience-actor relationship provides its own aura of invulnerability for the performance. But the potential fragility of that relationship in our experiment seemed to create a sort of precarious suspense that threw the dialogue into a new clarity, giving the poetry enhanced resonance, and making the predicament of the characters simpler and more poignant (xv-xviii).

Martin answers the question for himself regarding whether this production was closer to Yeats than a "professional rendering" such as Flannery's. He feels clearly that particularly through their lighting choice (which was close both to Yeats' suggestion and the reality of the original Abbey theatre) they helped to break down the "routine audience-actor relationship." This in Martin's mind made a great difference to the quality of their production. Here Martin echoes Hanrahan's feelings about a more intimate relationship with her audience.

Lapisardi does not necessarily agree with this, citing the initial concept, to apply *noh* techniques to Yeats as the problem. The issue of producing a professional performance he dismisses as this was the original form of production that Yeats approved for this play.

In my consideration of the two productions, I must turn to audience/reviewer reaction to be able to answer the question. In the case of the Sekine/Murray production, Hanrahan quotes a Yeatsian director who was in the audience on one of the two nights of performance:

> An Irish woman in the audience (Mrs. Rachel Burrows) [...] mentioned to me that it was good not to have used masks in *The Dreaming of the Bones* because the characters of the evening's production were well suited to fall spontaneously into their roles. In particular, Professor Chris Murray, in the role of Diarmuid, she noted, with his silver hair, stately mien, and his resonant expression was well suited to Yeats's Celtic verse (129-30).

Here, a professional director who was also an audience member found that the lack of masking not only worked but that Murray in particular handled Yeats' verse-speaking effectively. It is clear that, as both Hanrahan and Martin assert, Burrows was indeed impressed with the poetic language of the playwright. With the language front and centre and a Yeats director agreeing with a departure from Yeats' dramaturgy, I see that at least some of the experiment was a success. I am not prepared, based on this evidence, to call it a complete success but for Burrows and Hanrahan at least there were successful elements.

In the case of Flannery's production, perhaps due to the fact that he had an uninvited and therefore unchosen audience, there is no comparable theatre professional to comment upon the play as Burrows did for Sekine/Murray. Instead, a professional theatre reviewer, Madeleine Keane, spoke about the actors in glowing terms:

> "The people of dreams", the seven-hundred-year-old spirits of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla locked forever in an asexual dance, "unable to press lip upon lip" feature Olwen (Fouere) and her husband David Heap at their erotic best, their ghostly presence counterpointed by the sweaty muscular presence of Conor Mullen, the young rebel from the GPO who will not set them free by uttering the words of forgiveness (in Lapisardi, 187).

Here Keane shows that, first of all, Flannery's concept that the entirety of the play's action is the Young Man's dream has not been effectively communicated to her. The only time she mentions dreams is in reference to the couple as the "dreaming bones" of the play's title. Furthermore I see no evidence in the script itself that suggests in any way that the Young Man might be sleeping and the two ghosts but part of his dream.

Despite this issue, the pathos of the young lovers' story is clear to Keane. In particular she focuses on the heart-breaking inability of the two spirits to connect with one another physically again and the damning result of the Young Man's refusal of forgiveness. These aspects of the script have obviously been extremely well communicated both by the skill of the actors and that of the director.

In spite of Lapisardi's issues with the Sekine/Murray version, I feel that much of Yeats' dramaturgy survives in this version, particularly as regards the importance of the language. In the case of the Flannery version, I see less success with language and Flannery's ideas and more success with the heart of the play which is the sad story of the trapped ghosts. Burrows seems to have experienced the Sekine/Murray production as a highly refined piece of aesthetic work. Keane, however, seems to have reacted to a more emotionally affecting production. I believe that Yeats was more interested in creating a piece of intellectual theatre than one of emotion. Thus, I am forced to disagree with Lapisardi and follow

Burrow's reaction to a "form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way – an aristocratic form" (Yeats, *Certain Noble Plays,* II). This was how Yeats defined his goal for his *Plays for Dancers.* Furthermore he mentioned that "[i]t is an advantage of this noble form that it need absorb no one's life, that its few properties can be packed up in a box, or hung upon the walls where they will be fine ornaments" (II).

Martin in fact mentions that the masks from the Sekine/Murray production remain in exactly this spot. "I have them on the wall of my office" (xvi). It would seem that in many ways, Sekine and Murray, in experimenting with the *noh* form and its application to one of the *Plays for Dancers,* found something of Yeats that an Irish director and Yeats scholar working at the theatre that Yeats himself helped found could not.

As I finished this chapter, I found that I still had not fully addressed the issue of the playability of the *Plays for Dancers,* the central question of this thesis. While I have discussed whether or not these directors were true to Yeats in their productions and how well reviewers have reacted to various staged versions, I still have reached no conclusion regarding whether or not these plays are truly suitable for the stage, whether they can be considered living theatre or if they should be consigned to the bookshelf of a historical library. To able to accomplish this, I realized I would have to turn to other theatre professionals than the director and reviewer as will be seen in my Conclusion.

Conclusion – The Performability of Yeats' **Plays for Dancers**

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, there is a great deal of disagreement on the subject of whether or not Yeats' plays are really good for public production or are merely of interest from a literary standpoint as pieces of admirable poetry. When I first read Yeats' *Countess Cathleen,* I admit that I despaired of Yeats' playwriting abilities and wondered if I had chosen the right subject for this work. I found the language too flowery for public performance and I felt that the poetic aspects of it were too difficult and stilted to make for a decent play script. These are exactly the kind of charges levelled against Yeats by reviewers such as Chatterton. When I first read *At the Hawk's Well* (the first of *The Plays for Dancers* that I read), however, I felt a curiosity regarding the playwright's artistic intentions. I thought as I read it that the play could be very dramatic and that the script left many options for interesting staging. The entire play, unlike *Countess Cathleen,* by its nature as an avant-garde experiment made for some exciting possibilities in my opinion. *The Countess Cathleen,* on the other hand, was merely a historically based piece. This fact did not account for the high poetic language of the play. That was not true of *At the Hawk's Well* whose staging, mythic subject and setting literally set the stage for Yeats' verse. I have always thought that the *Plays for Dancers* would make for excellent theatre.

My reading is, as earlier established, that of a long-term working dramaturg both for university productions and professional ones. I always consider playability when I read a play script and I often include in that a generalized intended audience of Canadian theatregoers. I also think about the potential for interesting production choices inherent in the script. I ask myself how most actors or directors I know would handle the piece and occasionally I think about how I would direct such a play, if I would consider doing so at all. I look for issues of representation. As a feminist I particularly consider the position of women in the piece. I am also a materialist so I consider the political leanings inherent in the play.

My reactions to these issues when I read *At the Hawk's Well* were that I felt the script was entirely stageable. I thought it had good potential for interesting readings and exciting staging possibilities inherent in it. I considered it to be a less challenging piece from the point of view of language and plot than any Shakespeare history play. Therefore, I deemed that it was not too difficult for an average audience of Canadian theatregoers for whom Shakespeare productions are commonplace. I know many actors whom I think could handle the material and a number of directors who would be excited about such a project. I could see several ways of creating a production of this play, some of them in a more intimate setting and some in a more grand, theatrical style. From a feminist point of view there are issues. The Guardian of the Well, as a feminine character, acts as seductress and distraction while the absent Eofe is a mere plot device waiting offstage to be impregnated by Cuchulain. Cuchulain is in fact the only character on the stage with a name. This puts him clearly in the position of the subject of the play while the Guardian is the object, that which Cuchulain gazes upon. The Old Man acts as a kind of Chorus, along with the Musicians. Before he is entranced by the Guardian's dance, Cuchulain says to this only female character "[r]un where you will, / Grey bird, you shall be perched upon my wrist, / Some were called queens and yet have been perched there (*Controversies*, 350). With the Young Man as the subject and the Guardian, as object, equated with other women to perch upon his wrist as a possession, Yeats has certainly ensured that a woman of will and power like his long-term beloved Maud Gonne would be offended by this play. Expectations, however, for portrayals of women in 1916 were quite different than they are now. Further, it must be granted that there is a strong masculine bent to the Cuchulain legends both as Lady Gregory tells them and in the Cross/Slover edition. Thus, one can say that Yeats merely followed the original tales but I believe that any writer brings his/her own vision to a piece whether it be taken from a traditional story or not. These issues of representation can be a problem only depending on the way that a potential director decides to view the play. For some directors this would be good reason not to produce the play. However, for others it would be a reason to take a radical approach such as switching the genders of all the actors in order to highlight these issues. Indeed there is a precedent for this in the original production as it featured a male dancer (Ito) playing the female Guardian.

Apart from these obvious feminist concerns with the play, the political leanings of the play and the playwright are many. As seen above, Yeats sought to disassociate himself from purveyors of propaganda in the theatre. Putting aside the inherently political nature of claiming not to be political, Yeats did have a nationalist agenda with this and much of his other theatre. This agenda was to help re-permeate Irish culture with her own heroic mythology. Yeats believed that he could improve the Irish self image in this way. This was, in his view, his theatrical contribution to the Irish Cause. I see that Yeats was quite successful with this aspect of his dramaturgy. Indeed as seen in the understanding of Flannery's audience of the legends, as compared with that of American productions, there is a far greater knowledge in the Irish audience. Yeats did manage to inspire some of the Irish to respect their culture through these legends, whether or not they enjoyed his plays on the subject. Here he was remarkably successful.

These are my reactions to the *Plays for Dancers* as a theatre professional, part of whose job is to consider scripts for their suitability for production. When I read the position of literary reviewers of Yeats' work, however, I see that their goals and areas of interest are quite different from my own. Harold Bloom in his book simply titled *Yeats* speaks of Yeats "working in *Four Plays for Dancers* at one of the limits of literature" (293). As seen above, when viewing a play script, I see the piece as a potential staged production, not as literature. I consider many issues of putting the script into performance and few issues of its literary qualities. This is not so with Professor Bloom. He speaks of how Yeats was looking to find "a dramatic form in which the moods of *The Book of Thel* or *The Sensitive Plant* might be depicted. This means a drama revealing states-of-being rather than states-of-mind, which is probably impossible" (293).

It is clear here that Bloom had little if any understanding of *noh* theatre, as states-of-being is just what it reveals to its intended audience. In her treatise on Buddhism and *noh* Nafziger-Leis explains the ways in which *zen* Buddhism in particular are seen in Zeami's commentaries and reflected in *noh* itself

> very often one finds the *shite* as the reincarnation of some one who had previously lived. The *shite* usually confesses to the *waki* the events and passions of that former existence, which explain the reasons for the present sad condition of the incarnation. Or, for example, one might find a *shite* as a poor beggar woman, who has taken on this form because she, once young and beautiful, disdained her many lovers. Her past acts, which she confesses to the *waki,* have caused her present pitiful situation. (16)

It must be remembered that this revelation is what we would call in the West the climax of the play. The state-of-being of the *shite* character's soul is the main subject of the *noh* play.

Bloom goes on to discuss the importance of the hero in *At the Hawk's Well.* "Strong and clear as this fable is, it intimates also the old wisdom Yeats had learned in his High Romantic youth: there are two destructions, one dusty, one bright, and no salvation. One can burn to the socket, or pursue the poet's fate [...]. *At the Hawk's Well* is the hero's parable" (298). Here, Bloom's view of the play is clear in his language. He refers to it as both a "fable" and a "parable." Each of these forms was originally an oral form which has since become literary. To both Bloom and his reader, they are now the latter. One reads both forms, rather than hearing them. Bloom is discussing Yeats' link to Romanticism as a literary movement as well as discussing his play as a literary form and the playwright, as ever is portrayed as a poet. His reputation as a dramatist is entirely an irrelevant issue to Bloom. Bloom's rhapsodic and poetic reaction to *At the Hawk's Well* is certainly not unusual in literary reviews that I have seen of the *Plays for Dancers.* Bloom never addresses the issue of playability or discusses much of how this play would look on a stage. He does not discuss intended audience, potential directors, cast or designers. He is seeing it as a piece of literature, a book not a script for a possible performance situation. This literary reading of Yeats' work is not the only approach to it that I find, however.

In other volumes, for example, I encounter the reactions of theatre artists. In particular, Volume X of *Yeats – An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* is focussed on the Yeats International Theatre Festival. Opening with a statement by the director of the theatrical events at the first and second festivals, Flannery, this journal then goes on to feature the comments of other theatre artists involved in these productions specifically theatre reviewers and audience members.

Flannery had very positive comments on Yeats as a dramatist in which he spoke of *The Cuchulain Cycle* as though it was something that Yeats had put together as a unit himself. Flannery describes the *Cycle* as "Yeats's *magnum opus,* the five play 'Cuchulain Cycle'" which "can be interpreted as a record of Yeats's existential journey through the turbulent landscape of modern Ireland "(6). It is not the case that Yeats put the five plays together, although he often spoke about wanting to create such a cycle of plays. I find that referring to the *Cycle* as Yeats' *magnum opus* obscures the fact that Yeats never treated the plays as a single entity. As I noted in chapter six, the decision to put these plays together as a *Cycle* is already playing a bit fast and loose with Yeats' dramaturgy. Flannery's comments reflect the position of an artist for whom the plays have formed a whole, as Flannery has produced them as such. Due to the fact that he has created out of them a whole piece, Flannery's language reflects his view of the *Cycle* as a single production.

Flannery further states that Yeats' entire theatrical *oeuvre:*

> requires directors, designers, musicians, choreographers and dancers who possess what Yeats called "poetical culture", meaning the ability to respond to plays in imaginative and metaphorical terms [...] Finally, it requires artists who are committed to exploring the extraordinary ideas on the nature of human existence embodied in Yeats's plays.

The group of artists assembled to produce “The Cuchulain Cycle” were chosen with the above criteria in mind. (7)

As director, Flannery obviously discusses the production needs of a Yeats play, focussing on the various theatre professionals involved and the abilities, imaginative faculties and commitment required of them by Yeats' work. I feel that these are more Flannerian than Yeatsian expectations but as the director, he certainly had the right to require whatever he wished of his cast and crew. It is clear as I continued to read the comments of some of this group, that Flannery did well at finding members of “poetical culture”.

In discussing Bloom's understanding of *noh* theatre above, I examined how *noh* portrays states-of-being. In her comments on performing the part of Dervorgilla in Flannery's 1991 *Dreaming of the Bones,* Fouere seems to be saying that Yeats has successfully found a way to portray the same in this *noh*-influenced play. In considering the journey of the actor in a Yeats production, she asks the following questions regarding what will be expected of her:

> My body – am I male or female, androgynous or without flesh? Am I human, super-human, bird, animal, a dry bone that dreams, or a mouthful of air? Or am I in the very act of changing - “There floats out there the shape that I shall take when I am dead, my soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape, and is not that a strange shape for the soul of a great fighting man?”

(203)

Inherent in Fouere's comments one can see a description of an actor looking for the state-of-being of her character within the play. Also I see Flannery's "poetical culture" in her words. Clearly Fouere met Flannery's requirements for his production.

Whelan, who composed the music for Flannery's productions of both *The Cuchulain Cycle* and *Dreaming of the Bones,* also expresses some of his feelings regarding working with Yeats' material. Whelan starts out explaining how nervous he felt at the prospect of taking on such a project. He speaks of how "[t]he task of writing music for Yeats' plays is enough to freeze one into inertia" (216). Although he admits that Yeats was "not particularly enamoured of contemporary attempts to compose for his plays" (216), he nowhere remarks upon the fact that Yeats had composers who had already created original music for his plays. I am not sure if this is due to ignorance on Whelan's part, but I doubt it. He further remarks that "[h]owever, even those who don't rate him highly as a playwright (a view well represented within the current Abbey) have a pretty good notion of how they would approach the task and how it *should* be done" (216). This indicates that he had more than one conversation with the Yeats "fans and *aficionados"* (216) (as he terms them) regarding Yeats. I assume that at least some of them would have told Whelan about the original scores for the productions. For instance, while he wasn't a strict Yeats traditionalist when doing his own version of *The Cuchulain Cycle,* Lapisardi was involved with the Yeats Festival and certainly knew about Yeats' composers and where one could find the music. I am curious as to why Whelan avoids the question of composing new music instead of using the original. Perhaps he thought it irrelevant as it was not his decision to make. Indeed, Whelan does focus on the practical, showing some relief that in the second year of the Festival "the casting was weighted in favour of finding actors who could also sing" (218). This shows that Whelan was part of the process from the beginning of this production. Thus Flannery obviously enjoyed his work on the *Cuchulain Cycle* enough to invite him back to be involved with the casting.

Throughout his statement on working with Flannery on the Yeats Festival productions, Whelan emphasizes the importance of Yeats' speech rhythms to his work. "I became involved wholeheartedly with the plays, deciding to allow Yeats's written words to dictate my musical response, and to work my melodies around the superb rhythms of his songs" (217). Here I see a uniquely practical approach to the whole process. Whelan's focus was not on the past or the views of Yeats traditionalists but instead on what he was creating for each production. He focussed on the individual abilities of singers/actors as the material he had to work with and rolled up his sleeves, it seems to me. While he admired Yeats' rhythmical poetic style, he was certainly not a Yeats purist. He obviously saw in Yeats' verse inherent rhythms which would work well with music. This fact is not surprising as Yeats worked so long and hard to put music and poetry together.

Over the years a master poet like Yeats clearly would find a way to include rhythm in his work.

Unlike Whelan, designer Bronwen Casson, who designed for both the Flannery productions under discussion here, addressed the issue of the Yeats purist. "How much to follow? How much freedom to interpret loosely? Some things are essential. But too rigid a schematic process can produce deadliness" (221). She was speaking of the process of designing for a production. She said: "[t]he process of designing is more mundane. The quest for inspiration, an idea made visual. Doubting if it will ever come. Looking. Thinking" (221). While waiting for that inspiration, the designer had to ask herself how much of Yeats' suggestions she wanted to consider or include. Her description of what happens when they are followed overly strictly is itself poetic; "deadliness". Obviously Casson was looking to avoid a dull visual layout for each production. Here as with Whelan I find a distinctly practical position taken. However, unlike Whelan who eschewed the original music entirely, Casson asked herself how much of Yeats' ideas regarding design she should utilize. Finally, Casson employed her own poetic style to describe how well she thought the costumes worked in the second Yeats Festival production: "[t]imeless. Like a dream made momentarily immanent in life" (222). Casson is expressing how her costume design allowed such a feeling to exist on the stage, at least in her opinion. Again, here I see Flannery's requirement of being a part of poetic culture. Likewise Casson's remarks are quite reflective of Yeats' wishes for the aesthetics of his *Plays for*

Dancers. He was indeed looking for a timeless, dreamlike aspect to appear on the stage. For Yeats, however, this was to be made possible through the verse and acting technique more than the design.

Garry Hynes, the Artistic Director of the Abbey, included a very short, one-paragraph statement regarding the Festival. In it, he said:

> William Butler Yeats is still Ireland's foremost avant garde playwright. We return to his theatre work, in all its diversity and contradiction, not because we are sure of its place in the repertoire of modern Irish theatre, but because we are not. Yeats's plays are unsettled and unsettling, radically incomplete until methods of performance and reception by an audience which are adequate to them are found. (229)

I find Hynes' comments particularly honest. Yeats' plays are not part of the canon of Irish theatre although Yeats himself is definitely considered a central part of Irish theatre history. In particular I find Hynes' inclusion of the importance of finding an adequate audience reception very telling. This was one of Yeats' great quests in the theatre. He worked his entire adult life to find an adequate audience reception for his work and I do not believe he ever found it. This is one O'Casey's points as he discusses seeing *At the Hawk's Well* in Yeats' home as seen elsewhere in the thesis. As much as O'Casey criticized the production itself, he also criticized the audience's reaction to it. He felt that those who wandered around a fashionable event in a fashionable home simply repeated the word "beautiful" because they neither understood nor cared to understand Yeats' work but thought they ought to appear to appreciate it. Mitchell likewise questioned Yeats' choice of audience for the same performance. According to her the play "was a terrible army to set in motion against mere drawingroom folk, only the initiate of beauty could meet it undismayed" (142). Now what an "initiate of beauty" might be is not clear but obviously Mitchell felt that "mere drawingroom folk" were not it. Between Hynes and O'Casey I find two theatre professionals who are both looking for an audience which can truly appreciate Yeats' theatre. This is quite ironic as the search for the proper audience was very much what the creation of the *Plays for Dancers* was all about for Yeats.

I am not sure I agree that Yeats' work is nearly as impossible to comprehend as many do. I feel that much of understanding lies in the presentation of the work and, if it is performed with an intended audience's needs in mind, understanding or at least enjoyment can be reached. I believe this is seen in Lapisardi's production which puts the needs and knowledge of his audience at the centre of his direction.

Following the statements of artists involved in Flannery's Festival productions, there are "Critical Responses" in the *Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*. Desmond Rushe of *The Irish Independent* makes an admission regarding something he said in an earlier review of a Yeats play. "I wrote that there are those who understand the more abstract of his works, and those who do not; those who think they do and those who pretend they do [...] I placed myself in the second [category] and I still do. A precise understanding was beyond my reach then, as it is now and always will be" (230). When I was about 13 years old, a family friend took me to an exhibit of Pablo Picasso at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Because I was a child, it didn't bother me that I didn't understand much of the work because there was a great deal of the world that I didn't understand. It didn't make me feel small, awkward or threatened. This experience seems to have created a viewpoint for me that I have found very useful. When I do not fully "understand" a piece of art, I see if there's something there I can enjoy anyway. Thus, I rarely find myself in the position of trying to "understand" something on the stage and finding it beyond my reach. I have long since discovered that there is enough going on in a stage production of a full-length play that I will miss something. Instead of attempting to comprehend every nuance of the piece, I see if there's anything that strikes me as worthwhile. Also, if I know the work well enough to be aware of what the original intent was behind it, I apply what the artist was trying to do as my test of the piece. I am currently in exactly the opposite position from that of Rushe as I have yet to see a Yeats play in production but I have a clear understanding of the plays. I do not, however, think it is necessary is to be in this position to be able to enjoy a good production of Yeats. In fact, Rushe went on to state that:

> It happens all too frequently that people attending theatrical presentations

> of the Yeats type of play do so in the wrong frame of mind. They are so preoccupied with groping for meaning, significance, relevance that they end up missing out on the impact of the totality. Instead of pedantically searching for meaning, they should release their imagination from the strait-jacket of preconceived ideas based on the views of literary analysts (and, indeed, on the stated comments of Yeats himself), and let it soar. (230)

Thus, Rushe argues that my position is not so enviable and can in fact get in the way of enjoying a good production of Yeats. Rushe goes on to discuss some older reviews that he wrote of Yeats plays. Regarding *Dreaming of the Bones,* (not the Flannery production) at the Abbey he said that it "is not and never can be good theatre in the popular sense. It was works like this Yeats had in mind when he spoke of 'an unpopular theatre' with an audience of 50 or so" (231). Indeed, Rushe was correct regarding *Dreaming of the Bones,* that it belongs to the drawing room theatre group of plays. But what remains to be seen is whether the reviewer was correct in his view of the play's potential. Regarding this potential Rushe goes on to say that "[i]n passing these decidedly dismissive judgements on the quality of Yeats as a playwright, I was certainly expressing an honest response to what I had seen. But I was to learn that my strictures were aimed at the wrong target: the fault did not lie with Yeats but with the way he was handled" (231). Rushe then gives a positive opinion of Flannery's versions of Yeats plays.

> Jim Flannery reminding audiences at the Peacock Theatre that, despite his disdain for entertainment, and the formidable technical demands he imposes, Yeats can be a vastly entertaining dramatist. It depends on the treatment and, to some extent, on the disposition of the individual member of the audience.
>
> [...] Bryan MacMahon [...] once likened literary criticism to slitting a skylark's throat to find out how it sings. It is a vivid and striking simile, and it can be applied to those theatregoers who are bent on analysing and making sense of every line of Yeats dialogue. It could have been applied to me in the past, but not anymore: I have learned to be receptive to the song and to let my imagination follow its notes into a mystic cosmos. (233)

As for the slitting of the skylark's throat, I feel that in the interest of science, this would be a necessary procedure. In other words, sometimes things must be looked at in more reductive and reasoned ways. I don't feel that literary criticism or indeed the scientific study of an animal is a bad thing. It gives one a better idea of how the thing works. But I agree with Rushe that this knowledge is not necessary to enjoy the song of the skylark or a good night of theatre. While understanding Picasso's work helped me appreciate him more, because I had not lost my childlike wonder, it was not required for me to look at his work with interest and an open mind.

Finally, I will end with one particular audience response that was included in the Yeats journal under discussion. It is from Pat Quigley after viewing Flannery's *Cuchulain Cycle.*

> I have encountered no other moments such as these in modern drama, but felt returned to my childhood when I first read the old sagas and felt the full force of their poetry and power. The strength of this presentation was that the realistic and mystical levels of perception were so intertwined that the audience saw, like Emer, through layers of existence. The Cycle unites the rag and bone shop with the heights where the hawk soars. (250)

It seems clear to me, that Quigley has done exactly as Rushe prescribed with Yeats and allowed the imagination to soar. This was precisely Yeats' intent, to bring the magic and power of the Irish legends as he saw them to the audience and inspire that audience to believe in themselves because they were Irishwo/men. This was to be his nationalist contribution. Quigley further states that "[i]t has reawakened my interest in Yeats. His work encompasses the despair and confusion of much of our century, transcending it with a vision that is enriching and life-enhancing" (250). Quigley's is the letter that might have kept Yeats at the Abbey rather than driving him to the drawing room in search of an audience who could comprehend his work. Indeed much of the "despair and confusion" to which Quigley refers, especially in Ireland, has occurred since Yeats died. Yet still this audience member found it reflected in Yeats' work. Many critics speak of Yeats as an almost prophet-like figure, pre-saging dramatic movements long before they were popularly accepted. It seems that for Quigley Yeats was able to pre-sage some of the Irish political 'troubles' still to come or at least to create work which could help those who lived through them cope with it. Quigley's response is exactly the reason that Yeats wrote about Cuchulain and many other Irish legends. Here I see a playwright who was completely successful in his intended purpose.

Yeats' success as a playwright lies in the continuing struggle that theatre professionals engage in with his material, as described by Hynes. It lies in the decisions of North American directors and a composer of opera in New Zealand to tackle his works in their own ways. It lies in theatre reviewers, fearful of his 'esoteric' and poetic plays who are swept away by their mystical beauty. It lies in the many positive audience reactions found and quoted herein. And it lies most of all in the shock and surprise of a Canadian graduate student who has discovered in Irish theatre a touch of Japanese *noh.* Yeats dared to experiment and make an attempt to create theatre which satisfied him completely. He worked tirelessly with actors, musicians, composers, visual artists and dancers to find those who could share in his theatre aesthetic and help create it on a stage. He helped found the professional theatre in Ireland and he fought for freedom of speech on his stage. Yeats wrote plays of many different types, calibres and genres. He never stopped writing plays and he never wrote down to his audience. He was a thoroughly dramatic writer in that the concept of the mask and the spiritual aspects of theatre were central to his life. I say that he was a successful dramatist for these reasons, not because he wrote popular entertainment. Like Shakespeare, Yeats' work is a challenge to his audience and this is a high recommendation in a playwright. While Yeats would not write propaganda, he always wrote his plays with the welfare of his country in mind. Following his prescriptions for the production of one of his *Plays for Dancers* is not essential for a good staging, but remembering his goals as a playwright are. This is what is seen in the comments of Quigley in particular. Yeats tried to inspire the Irish but it seems he has inspired people throughout the world instead. Although his work is not perfect, it is always interesting.

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